



low. After 1968, the national Democratic Party underwent a transformation, becoming more liberal, with stronger representation among previously underrepresented groups. The party staked out progressive positions on women's rights, particularly support for the Equal Rights Amendment and the support for a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy, that were at odds with many culturally conservative white voters in the South.

The country's involvement in the Vietnam War had caused serious rifts in the national Democratic Party but had left southern politicians relatively unscathed. The increasingly confrontational and violent protests against the country's military involvement in Southeast Asia provided fertile ground for southern politicians such as Wallace to attack his fellow Democrats. The South itself was more supportive of the war generally and for longer than the rest of the nation. The southern economy benefited from the war, making residents of that region more likely to support its expansion. Political leaders from the region played key roles in the Vietnam drama, including President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Senators Richard Russell and John Stennis, and Congressman L. Mendel Rivers, as well as military leaders such as General William Westmoreland and Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore. Southern men served in Vietnam in numbers that far surpassed the region's share of the population. White southern college students remained more consistently pro-war than their peers elsewhere in the nation. Many even supported the U.S. invasion of Cambodia—an action that sparked massive protests on campuses elsewhere—and rated President Richard Nixon's handling of the war as "excellent" or "pretty good." A minority of white college students in the South protested the war, and the tactics used by these minority dissenters tended to be less violent and less radical than tactics used by college students elsewhere.

Black southerners' relationship to the Vietnam War was different from that of their white counterparts. For African American college students in the region, antiwar activities took a backseat to agitation for domestic racial issues. African American students remained "acutely aware of the deadly force directed at the protestors" on Black college campuses. Protesting the war was much riskier for Black college students than for white. As for military service, the motives of Black soldiers from southern states differed from those of white soldiers. The prevalence of poverty, the racism of draft boards, and African Americans' inability to join Army Reserve and National Guard units meant that southern Blacks faced fewer options and consequently served in numbers greater than their share of the population. They also were more likely than white soldiers to be drafted, to serve in combat, and to be wounded or killed.<sup>41</sup>



With their prospects in presidential contests at an all-time low, Democrats confronted challenges at the state level. If Democrats were going to remain competitive in gubernatorial and congressional races, they had to build viable biracial coalitions. The 1970s witnessed the rise of what came to be known as New South governors, moderate Democrats who won the support of the majority of Black voters and enough suburban white voters to overcome white majorities that backed Republican candidates. To accomplish this, Democratic candidates had to mix relatively conservative positions on social and economic issues to appeal to whites with moderate positions on race to satisfy Black constituents. Their positions diverged from those of the national Democratic Party, which was moving further to the Left in the early 1970s. Included in this group were Reubin Askew of Florida, Jimmy Carter of Georgia, Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, James Hunt of North Carolina, and William Winter of Mississippi. Among Deep South states, only Alabama failed to elect a New South moderate. These Democratic governors focused on providing efficient and honest government, and continued the goal of modernizing the South through the attraction of outside investment and the capture of federal dollars. They understood as well as anyone that investment dollars would not come to a region roiled by racial strife. They prided themselves on promoting racial harmony and on acquiring funding for public infrastructure, health, and education. They eschewed generous spending on welfare or other programs designed to help the impoverished. Despite the U.S Supreme Court's explosive 1971 decision that school districts could use busing to achieve racial balance, most New South leaders studiously avoided the issue.

Much of the federal spending that occurred in the South was related to the military. Because the South had a strong presence in the Pentagon and southern leaders enjoyed congressional seniority, southern states received more than their fair share of military installations and military contracts. Facilities for the space program and for military and nuclear weapons programs abounded in the South. Such spending became a huge part of the region's growth. Between 1959 and 1980, the South led all regions in economic growth. But defense spending did little to aid the poor, particularly the Black poor. Jobs in many of these new industries were at the skilled or professional level, and most went to recent transplants from elsewhere in the country. As one historian has put it, the growth strategy of southern leaders privileged place over people.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the most consequential of these New South governors was Jimmy Carter of Georgia, elected in 1970. Declaring at his inauguration that "the time for racial discrimination is over. ... No poor, rural, weak, or black person should ever have to bear the additional burden of being

deprived of the opportunity of an education, a job, or simple justice," Carter focused on making state government more efficient and government services more effective. Carter's 1976 nomination as the Democratic Party's candidate for president was nothing short of phenomenal. A proud Southern Baptist and lifelong resident of the rural Deep South, Carter's outsider status and image as a man of integrity made him an appealing choice for many voters disgusted by the corruption of Republican Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal. Nixon's resignation had rebounded in Democrats' favor in Congress and in southern statehouses in 1974, where Democrats reclaimed a number of seats. But in 1976, although Carter won every southern state except Virginia, he only garnered 46 percent of the white vote despite his conservative religious credentials and southern roots. His victory was largely the work of African American voters who went to the polls in even greater numbers than they had in 1968.





FIGURE 12.4. Black southerners made the greatest gains in public officeholding at the municipal and county levels in the 1970s. Among these new city leaders was Richard Arrington Jr. (*standing*), elected mayor of Birmingham in 1979. Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

The increase in the number of Black voters between 1970 and 1980, from 3.4 million to 4.3 million, also had an impact on Black officeholding. In the South in 1965, only 72 Black citizens

held public office; Mississippi had no Black public officials. By 1980, there were roughly 2,500 Black officeholders. The bulk of these positions were at the municipal and county levels. Blacks won mayoral contests, mostly in small and mid-sized towns such as Tuskegee but also in large cities such as Atlanta and Birmingham. Victories for Black politicians brought heightened expectations from Black constituents. Although Black voters finally had the ear of the officials who ran their communities, the tax bases in urban areas were seldom sufficient to deal with the myriad problems. Despite these gains at the polls, as of 1982 Blacks constituted a paltry 7 percent of state legislators.

As Democrats worked to create biracial coalitions to remain viable in the South, their power in Congress—especially their ability to kill what they considered threatening legislation—was diluted. Since the 1930s, the ability of southern representatives and senators to gain seniority, occupy important committee chairmanships, and operate as a bloc had been critical to protecting white supremacy. Since the late 1940s, liberals in the Democratic Party had been working to handicap conservative members of their party (mainly those from the South), who were increasingly out of step with the party's agenda. By the late 1950s, liberal Democrats were irate that the party's conservative members voted with Republicans roughly 80 percent of the time. Change followed the Supreme Court's decision in the 1962 case *Baker v. Carr*, which mandated redistricting. The result was a decline in the number of congressional districts with overrepresented rural population majorities and an increase in representatives who were less conservative and less wedded to the old ways. The impact in states such as Florida was profound, flip-flopping the preponderance of political power from the mostly white and rural panhandle to the racially and ethnically diverse urban regions and wealthy suburbs from Orlando south. The reapportionment took into consideration the enfranchisement of millions of Black voters; conservative rural white bastions as the sole means of electoral support were a thing of the past.

A reform movement within Congress simultaneously increased the power of members from underrepresented suburban districts and others who rejected the old hierarchical structure of Congress, which had granted enormous power to committee chairmen. The 1970s Legislative Reorganization Act required committee hearings to be public; many were broadcast on radio and television. Congressional reformers also succeeded in requiring the vote of the caucus for committee chairs; agreed that the Speaker, majority leader, and whip should serve on the powerful Ways and Means Committee; and succeeded in stripping the Ways and Means chair of the power to appoint committee members. New members to the House had sufficient power



to demand that all committee chairs be interviewed to determine whether they deserved reappointment. Three committee chairmen, all from the South, made bad impressions, and the caucus voted to remove them. The ironclad system of seniority in the House had been shattered. The Senate, likewise, underwent reform. Committee chairs were chosen by secret ballot. Most committee hearings were open to the public. The biggest reform, though, addressed the filibuster. For decades, southern Democrats had used this tool to paralyze the Senate and kill civil rights legislation. In 1975, the Senate voted to reduce the number of votes for cloture (which ends a filibuster) from two-thirds of the Senate (sixty-seven votes) to three-fifths (sixty votes). Southern politicians' ability to hold the Senate in a stranglehold had finally been broken.

At the state level, the Republican Party was practically nonexistent in the 1970s and 1980s. Republican success remained a top-down affair. Republican candidates struggled to dislodge Democratic incumbents who delivered federal projects—many related to defense work—for their districts. Beyond Senators Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond, the Republicans could claim no southern congressman or senator of any stature some ten years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. In the 1960s and 1970s, Republicans had little success electing candidates to Congress. Democratic candidates during these two decades won 97 percent of all congressional races.

Republican prospects in the region began to change with the development of two phenomena. The first was the rise of the Christian Right and its political mobilization of conservative Christian voters. The so-called Rights Revolution, which drew inspiration and power from the civil rights revolution, prompted a political backlash. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Supreme Court handed down decisions that banned organized school prayer, protected the rights of accused persons, and, most important in this context, protected a woman's right to seek an abortion. In 1972, Congress approved the Equal Rights Amendment and sent it out to the states for ratification. For conservative evangelical Christians in both the North and the South, the nation was in cultural crisis. The survival of the family and traditional gender roles was at stake. Organizing nationally under the auspices of groups such as the Moral Majority, founded in 1979, and the Christian Coalition, founded in 1989, but operating locally through thousands of evangelical churches, Christian conservatives flexed their political muscles. They were almost universally wedded to the Republican Party. According to one historian of southern religion, evangelical churches essentially served as precinct headquarters for the Republican Party. This grassroots political realignment unfolded with stunning speed. In 1980, only 29

percent of Southern Baptist ministers identified as Republicans; within five years—by 1985—that number had grown to 66 percent.

The support of politically energized evangelicals was critical to the election of Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan in 1980. A former actor, corporate spokesman, and most recently governor of California, Reagan was a conservative icon. During the campaign, he appeared sympathetic to evangelicals' desires for a school prayer amendment and other conservative cultural ambitions but spent little political capital making them a reality once in office. Significantly for Republican prospects in the South, issues of culture and religion—framed broadly as “family values”—cut across class lines, giving the Republicans access to the allegiance of the region's working-class whites who had previously supported George Wallace. Also propelling Reagan to the White House was a backlash against the welfare state, which had expanded under Lyndon Johnson's Great Society agenda. To Reagan, government was the enemy; free enterprise was the people's friend. The downturn in the economy in the 1970s focused white conservatives' attention on government programs that, in their estimation, primarily benefited the Black poor. Beginning with the resounding defeat of Carter and the election of Reagan, and accelerating thereafter, Republicans began to pick up southern seats in Congress and state legislatures on platforms promoting cultural conservatism, low taxes, a strong military, and limited government. Before Reagan's election, 40 percent of southern white conservatives identified with the Republican Party; by the end of Reagan's presidency, 60 percent proudly did so.





FIGURE 12.5. Senator Strom Thurmond's switch to the Republican Party and the popularity of President Ronald Reagan among white southern conservatives set off a two-decade-long transition of white Democrats to the Republican Party. Congressman Floyd D. Spence (*left*) began his political career as a Democrat; in 1970 he won a congressional seat as a Republican. Courtesy of Floyd D. Spence Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

Other issues cemented the Republican Party's strength in the South. Demographic change and the continued growth of the military-industrial complex worked in the party's favor. Cuban exiles from the Cuban Revolution in 1959 developed strong ties to the Republican Party in Florida because of its strong stance against communism and its support of conservative cultural causes. By 1980, the South was the recipient of 40 percent of the defense budget. Industries such as aircraft building and chemicals moved south, drawn by generous tax breaks and attracted by the antiunion climate. Still, success at winning congressional seats was slow. Between 1980 and 1992, the number of Senate seats and governorships the Republicans controlled remained about the same. At the state level, in 1988, only 23 percent of state legislators were Republican.

The consolidation of Republican power in the South occurred during the presidency of Democrat Bill Clinton, a white southerner. He won only 43 percent of the popular vote; the third-party candidacy of Texas businessman Ross Perot cut into the Republican vote for Pres-

ident George H. W. Bush. Already a minority president, Clinton's first two years were marred by political missteps. Republican whip Newt Gingrich of Georgia sensed an opportunity to flip seats during the 1994 midterm elections. Gingrich staged a national campaign for Republican House candidates, who pledged themselves to uphold the "Contract with America," a list of conservative agenda items that included lower taxes, decreased welfare spending, and legislation dedicated to promoting "family values." The Democrats were steamrolled, losing fifty-five seats and control of the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years. Republicans also picked up seats in the Senate. The Republican Party's increased presence in the South was obvious: they added sixteen new seats in the House to the nine they had won in 1992. The Republican Party now held a slim majority—51 percent—of the South's representation in the House of Representatives. The Republicans controlled the South's delegations in the House and the Senate and captured a majority of the statehouses.

Republican prospects were made considerably brighter by reapportionment of congressional districts following the 1990 census. Population growth had given the South nine new congressional seats. With no Democratic incumbents to challenge, Republican chances improved considerably. In redrawing congressional district lines, every southern state except Arkansas created a Black-majority district. Although these new Black-majority districts essentially ensured an increase in Black representatives, the remaining districts left African Americans in the minority, making them easier for Republicans to win. With the tremendous victories of 1994, Republican candidates seemed like a better bet to opportunistic donors. Funds flowed into campaign coffers. Republicans cemented their presence as the decade wore on. During the 2000 election, Republicans won 71 of the South's 125 House seats, 19 of 33 Senate seats, and 43 percent of seats in state legislatures.

The Republican Party was firmly entrenched in the South by the year 2000, little more than three decades since the landmark civil rights bills of the mid-1960s. It was clearly identified as the conservative party. Republicans in the region could point to some pockets of ethnic diversity, including Cuban Americans in Florida and Mexican Americans in Texas; otherwise the party was overwhelmingly white. Republican voters were attracted to the party's "family values" and low-tax orientation, as well as its probusiness agenda. Increased spending on social programs—which many white voters associated with poor Blacks—was anathema to Republican voters in the South. The Black poor were routinely demonized and scapegoated, and programs such as affirmative action and welfare were frequent targets of Republican wrath.



Racial exclusivity was key to the Republican Party's success, and the Republicans were the primary recipients of the "politics of rage" previously stoked by George Wallace.

Republican election gains were bolstered by conservative judicial decisions that further undermined the ability of the Democratic Party to successfully compete across the South. In 2013, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down an important provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965: it declared that the coverage formula for determining which jurisdictions had to "preclear" changes to their elections rules was out of date and no longer necessary. The response from southern states was immediate. Texas announced that it would implement a strict photo ID law for voter registration, while Alabama and Mississippi declared that they would enforce similar laws that had been banned under the preclearance requirement. Studies have demonstrated that photo ID laws disproportionately disadvantage minority and elderly populations. In Texas alone, such a law would result in the purging of some 600,000 voters.

The Democrats remained viable, but their task was exceedingly difficult. They received the support of the vast majority of African American voters, but needed to attract between 30 and 40 percent of the white vote to remain competitive. A pledge to promote growth and high-quality public education became the default stance of most Democratic office seekers. Promoting agendas that kept this biracial coalition together would prove exceedingly difficult as the twenty-first century dawned.

Will a democratic, representative politics survive, if not entirely thrive, in the South? That remains an open question. By the end of the first decade of the new century, Black officeholding at the state level continued to lag behind the actual demographics. In Mississippi, for example, Black people made up roughly 38 percent of the population but held only 29 percent of the seats in the state's legislature. The picture looked a little brighter in Alabama, where Black people constituted 26 percent of the population and Black legislators held roughly a quarter of the seats. Partisanship has grown more extreme in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Republican state legislatures have used their power to deprive Democrats of representation, replicating the antidemocratic tools of an earlier era. Strict voter ID laws have fallen most heavily on the Democrats' core constituency, and grassroots advocates continue to fight hard to prevent voter purges. In addition, Democrats in southern states have seen their election prospects diluted by Republican gerrymandering. In North Carolina, despite a relatively evenly split electorate, Democrats garnered only three of the state's thirteen congressional seats following a 2016 redrawing of district lines by Republicans. Amplified by an expanding,

noisy right-wing media environment, Republicans in the South and nationwide have doubled down on a politics of white grievance, questioning the legitimacy of the nation's first African American president and using every possible political and legal tactic to effectively disfranchise people of color. Democrats in the South have been able to overcome these obstacles only through the most heroic of efforts. In this hyperpartisan political climate, race remains the defining factor of southern political life, and Republicans continue to practice a politics of subtraction. John Bankhead Jr.'s "new order of things" has returned, only this time it is Republicans erecting the barriers. A truly democratic South remains elusive.

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## Republican demands Congress vote on Pentagon abortion policy: 'We are not a communist country'

Tommy Tuberville aims to block policy offering aid to service members and dependents forced to travel for abortions



Tommy Tuberville at the Capitol on Tuesday. He said of his refusal to back down: 'I think they're starting to believe that I meant what I said'. Photograph: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Defending his blocking promotions that has left hundreds of military officers in limbo and the US army, navy and marines without Senate-confirmed leaders, the Alabama Republican Tommy Tuberville demanded a congressional vote on Pentagon abortion policy.

He added: "We are not a communist country."

In return, one Democrat invoked a Republican president revered for standing up to communism, and said Ronald Reagan was "rolling in his grave".

Tuberville explained his stance to Bloomberg TV, saying: "I got a briefing about a year ago, what they were gonna do with the new abortion policy. We didn't need one ... Joe Biden and the Democrats ... just decided to change it."

The policy offers aid to service members and dependents forced to travel for abortions because they are based in a state which restricts it, as many Republican-run states have since the US supreme court removed the right last year.

Tuberville continued: "They voted [Pentagon abortion policy] through Congress in 1984, but in 2023 they want to change it with a memo from the White House.

"We're not a communist country. Everything that makes policy and law goes through Congress. And I told them, 'If you change it, I'm gonna block your admirals and generals.' At that time there was one or two. Now we're up to 300. I think they're starting to believe that I meant what I said."

At the top of the US military, the chair of the joint chiefs of staff, Gen Mark Milley, is due to step down this month. His replacement, Gen CQ Brown, is in the queue held up.

Officials have pointed to the plight of lower-ranked officers. In a Washington Post column, the secretaries of the army, navy and air force said: "We know officers who ... are facing genuine financial stress because they have had to relocate their families or unexpectedly maintain two residences.

"Military spouses who have worked to build careers of their own are unable to look for jobs because they don't know when or if they will move. Children haven't known where they will go to school, which is particularly hard given how frequently military children change schools already."

Tuberville, who coached the Auburn University football team before entering politics, has been criticised for not having served. He told Bloomberg he was a "military brat" whose father "died on active duty".

Critics also say Tuberville is affecting preparedness to face national security threats.

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Mark Warner, a Democratic senator from Virginia, told Bloomberg Radio: "Ronald Reagan has to be rolling over in his grave. These kinds of political antics are making our military less strong and our country more weak by playing politics on this issue. I hope and pray that that my Republican colleagues, a lot of whom have expressed concerns to me privately ... will put ... pressure on."

The Maine Republican Susan Collins said Tuberville should limit his holds to "only those individuals who have policy responsibilities".

Tuberville said Democrats who control the Senate "can be clearing these nominations one at a time, two hours each. They don't want to do that."

That would be extremely time-consuming. So far, more pressure has built on Tuberville than on the majority leader, Chuck Schumer of New York.

Tuberville said: "We're not gonna have any movement on my side unless they change this [policy] back. Let's vote on it. And if it passes, it passes. Done is done."

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# COLD WAR DIXIE

MILITARIZATION AND MODERNIZATION  
IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

KARI FREDERICKSON



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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Shifting Landscapes

#### Politics and Race in a Cold War Community

From 1941 to 1948, Aiken County was represented in the South Carolina state senate by Fred Brinkley, a physician from the tiny town of Ellenton. In addition to being one of the town's two doctors, Brinkley was also a part-time farmer and owner of the one of the town's gristmills. A longtime resident of Ellenton, Brinkley was closely tied to the region's agricultural rhythms and was active in community affairs. And like every other state senator, Brinkley was a Democrat in a state that reviled Republicans. In the early 1950s, after Ellenton was condemned to make room for the Savannah River Plant (SRP), Brinkley moved to the city of Barnwell. He died relatively soon after the evacuation, in June 1952, with his passing serving as poignant symbol of the larger transformations under way in the area.<sup>1</sup>

The influx of thousands of new residents from communities across the nation altered not only the region's demographics, built environment, economic profile, and cultural identity but also its politics. In 1968, fifteen years after operations commenced at the SRP, Aiken County voters elected George McMillan to represent them in the State Senate. A Republican and former Du Pont supervisor at the SRP, McMillan was just one of a growing number of Republicans elected to public office in Aiken County and in the expanding suburban regions across South Carolina and other southern states in the 1960s and 1970s. The origins of the Republican Party lay in the communities housing the plant employees; the party drew strength from their conservative, middle-class values, forged not only by opposition to certain New Deal-era programs and staunch anticommunism but also from notions of efficiency and modernization as they applied to the political process. Such values were also deeply engrained in Du Pont's corporate culture.

The growth of the Republican Party in Aiken County coincided with and at times appeared synonymous with the acceleration of school integration. Although the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 motivated thousands of white southerners to vote Republican, the party's roots in South Carolina went further back and were tied to the changes brought on by the Cold War. Integration in this region was in part shaped by Du

Pont's corporate culture. Although the company encouraged employees to participate in local and state politics, there was an understanding that employees were not to engage overtly in the desegregation debate and were to let the issue run its course. As with its employment strategy, Du Pont preferred to follow local custom rather than challenge it directly.

School integration proceeded as slowly in Aiken County as it did in other towns across the South, but without the extreme public acrimony and outright violence present in some communities. Although whites in Aiken County—both longtime residents and newcomers—were content to drag their feet on the issue, the impending threat of a loss of federal funds as well as the judicial dismantling of freedom-of-choice school-assignment plans in the late 1960s finally brought desegregation to the region. When meaningful integration finally came to the county in 1970, white resistance died with a whimper.

The relatively uneventful process of integration partly resulted from factors related to Aiken's particular historical development as well as the more recent changes brought about by the Cold War. White resistance in this corner of South Carolina was muted by a variety of factors, including changing demographics, the influence of Du Pont's particular corporate culture, the central role given to large corporations for securing prosperity and security, the reputation of black schools, and the presence of Winter Colony residents. The intense backlash and white flight to private academies found in other communities simply was not present in Aiken. While not exactly welcoming of the prospect of integration, white parents also were unwilling to take extreme measures to stop it.



Following company president Crawford H. Greenewalt's advice, Du Pont employees became involved in the city's political institutions, initiating innovations that were based on their desire for modern, efficient, representative government, something that seemed lacking in this one-party region. The majority of Du Pont's permanent operations staff took up residence in Aiken's burgeoning suburbs and in the highly suburbanized town of North Augusta. To bring order and efficiency to the development chaos that was the result of rapid residential expansion, residents of these suburban enclaves organized civic associations that would regularly and collectively bring particular neighborhood issues before the city council. The first such group organized was the Crosland Park Civic Association. By the early 1960s, every suburb boasted a neighborhood association.<sup>2</sup>



These new civic associations were in the forefront of promoting a change in city government from the commission form to a city manager system. Crosland Park Civic Association took the lead among newcomers in supporting the transition to a full-time city manager system, which, members believed, would promote "sound principles of efficient city administration." A full-time city manager would be better equipped to handle the problems associated with rapid growth, something Crosland Park residents knew only too well. The five-hundred-plus-home subdivision was cursed with chronic sewage overflow, a complaint regularly brought before the city council.<sup>3</sup> Crosland Park residents likewise supported the "appointment of city employees on the basis of merit apart from political considerations or influence," as well as "planning and zoning provisions which provide for orderly growth, stabilize property values, and protect the citizens of Aiken from the inconvenience, danger, and expense which can result from irresponsible real property development." Finally, the association called for "a carefully developed system of public hearings which assure that the citizens of Aiken shall have the opportunity to be heard in matters of basic policy determination." By calling for a merit system and a transparent decision-making process, the new residents were advocating not only for a more democratic and representative government but for a process that in many ways resembled the scientific process, in which all variables are carefully weighed.<sup>4</sup> With the new neighborhood associations in the lead, Aiken residents overwhelmingly approved the adoption of the city manager system.<sup>5</sup>

Du Pont employees likewise were instrumental in bringing two-party politics to what had been a one-party state. Du Ponters took the lead in promoting Republican candidates in national elections and in organizing the first county-level Republican Party, joining other white-collar suburbanites around the state and region in developing a viable second party. South Carolina's one-party system had grown out of historical racial and political animosities. Since Reconstruction, the Republican Party had been anathema to South Carolina's white voters, synonymous with "negro control." The return to Democratic Party rule in the 1870s was marred by violence, perhaps nowhere worse than in Aiken County, which had seen two of the worst race riots in state history in 1876. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, South Carolina was the region's most reliably Democratic state, refusing to bolt the party in 1928 and polling huge numbers for Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s. The Republicans rarely fielded candidates for office even at the state's highest levels, and Democrats dominated local politics in all forty-six counties. According to one account, by midcentury, "the South Carolina GOP was merely a quaint relic of the past, widely accused of graft, corrup-



tion, and gross mismanagement.”<sup>6</sup> Republican conventions were derided as “the semi-annual gathering of the pie brigade” where the spoils of party patronage were distributed.<sup>7</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the national Democratic Party began to emerge in the 1930s and 1940s as changes brought on by the Great Depression, New Deal, and World War II began to chip away at a southern caste system grounded in low-wage labor and white supremacy. By the late 1940s, a growing number of whites were becoming increasingly hostile toward the national Democratic Party’s position on civil rights. In 1948, outraged at President Harry S. Truman’s civil rights initiatives and the inclusion of a civil rights plank in the Democratic Party platform, South Carolina Democrats joined white conservatives from several other southern states and bolted the national party, throwing their support behind the States’ Rights Democratic Party, more commonly known as the Dixiecrats. Led by presidential candidate and South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond, the Dixiecrats hoped to wrest enough votes from Truman to throw the election into the House of Representatives. In the end, the Dixiecrats won only four states, but their campaign constituted a shot across the political bow, serving notice to the national Democratic Party that white southerners’ political allegiance could no longer be taken for granted. Still, despite their misgivings about the direction of the national party, wrenching a majority of southern whites away from the Democratic Party was going to be extremely difficult. Once “liberated,” where would they go? By the early 1950s, the South still had no meaningful Republican Party organization. Southern whites unhappy with the direction of the Democratic Party continued to express their displeasure in presidential elections, voting in unprecedented numbers for the Republican candidate, but not as members of any local Republican organization. The existing party apparatus was too weak, too corrupt. Any viable Republican Party would have to be built from scratch by individuals free of the historical political baggage carried by white southerners.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the impetus behind the growth of the Republican Party was the particular economic change that accompanied the Cold War. Between 1950 and 1970, 90 percent of growth in employment in industry in the South took place in high-wage industries, many of them considered part of the military-industrial complex.<sup>9</sup> These white-collar employees, housed in expanding urban and suburban areas, increasingly identified their economic interests as resting with the Republican Party.<sup>10</sup> South Carolina’s employment profile changed dramatically. Aiken County was one of the state’s fastest growing in terms of industrial expansion. In Aiken County in 1940, 31.5 percent of adults were employed in agriculture; by 1970, that percentage had dropped to 2 percent. In 1940, Aiken County was roughly 18 percent urban; by 1970, 44.4



percent of the population lived in metropolitan areas. Over the same period, the percentage of Aikenites employed in white-collar jobs shot from 15 percent to 41 percent. As part of this transition, the county had become wealthier. From 1953 to 1962, purchasing power in the county rose by five hundred dollars per capita and two thousand dollars per household, and retail sales doubled in dollar volume.<sup>11</sup> Such changes were not limited to Aiken. Overall, South Carolina's suburban population grew by nearly 400 percent between 1950 and 1970.<sup>12</sup> Aiken joined rapidly expanding counties such as Richland (Columbia), Greenville, Lexington, and Charleston in the white-collar suburban boom.

Profound political change followed this economic transformation. From 1946 to 1963, South Carolina had the lowest level of party competition in the South. Between 1964 and 1974, however, it moved into first place in the Deep South and seventh overall in the region. No other Deep South state experienced increasingly competitive two-party gubernatorial elections between 1960 and 1975.<sup>13</sup>

The expanding metropolitan areas were the source of the reborn Republican Party. In 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower drew support from wealthier whites in the urban and suburban areas of South Carolina, as well as more race-conscious whites in the majority black lowcountry who were disturbed at the role of civil rights in the Democratic Party platforms of the late 1940s and early 1950s. By 1956, skeleton Republican Party organizations existed in roughly half of the state's forty-six counties. Between 1956 and 1963, the party had no paid staff and no official, continuing central headquarters. Party leadership came from a mishmash of businessmen, disaffected Democrats, and newcomers, most of them political novices.<sup>14</sup>

The early leaders of South Carolina's retooled Republican Party were recent transplants. Gregory D. Shorey Jr., for example, was born in Massachusetts and educated at Boston University, ultimately earning a graduate degree in public relations and marketing communications. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and subsequently became active in the Massachusetts Republican Party. In 1950, he moved to Greenville, South Carolina, where he founded a company that manufactured marine safety and water sports equipment and moved quickly to the top of the state Republican Party hierarchy. He served as state chair of Eisenhower for President in 1952 and 1956, a Republican elector in 1952 and 1956, state executive chair from 1954 to 1956, and state chair from 1956 to 1962.<sup>15</sup> The nascent GOP received financial backing from Roger Mil-likan, president of the family owned Deering-Milliken Textile Corporation, the world's third-largest textile firm. Milliken had contributed extensively to the national Republican Party but had avoided the dysfunctional state party until the revamped version emerged



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## Corporate Culture, the Cold War, and the American South in the 1950s and 1960s



KARI FREDERICKSON

IN 1956, William Faulkner lamented that agriculture no longer stood at the center of the southern economy. “Our economy,” he remarked, “is the Federal Government.”<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the immediate post-World War II era, the region that once had been dominated by cotton fields, tenant shacks, and textile mill villages was rapidly giving way to defense installations, aerospace engineering facilities, and suburbs. Within three decades, federal spending changed the South’s economic base and demographics to such a degree that by the early 1980s the region that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had once identified as “the nation’s number one economic problem” had become one of the nation’s leading industrial producers. Much of this federal spending was filtered through the rapidly expanding military-industrial complex necessitated by the Cold War. Consequently, although federal dollars constituted the engine that drove change in the South, the direction and shape of change was very much determined by the various corporate entities that moved south in the 1950s and 1960s to capitalize on this federal largesse.

To date, studies of the impact of the Cold War on the American South have been largely confined to examining the complex impact of anticommunism on southern politics and the budding civil rights movement. Anti-communism poisoned the liberal political well and fueled the massive resistance movement, making even the most tepid statement on racial progress by an elected official a sure road to political oblivion. But the Cold War contributed more than just toxic anticommunism to the South’s political

landscape. The economic and demographic impact of the military-industrial complex throughout the region was profound. The development of new aerospace facilities around Atlanta, the growth of the space industry in Huntsville and on the east coast of Florida, the development of the Research Triangle in North Carolina, and the proliferation of military contracts generally brought thousands of new, highly educated workers to the region.<sup>2</sup> Many of these new workers brought their Republican politics with them. At the very least, few possessed the historically based, reflexive support of the Democratic Party on matters of race that had plagued the South since the turn of the century. Unencumbered by the region's historic hostility to the Republican Party, these Cold War immigrants became the foot-soldiers in the creation of a modern civic politics and of the two-party system in the South.

This was nowhere more true than in western South Carolina. In 1950, the Atomic Energy Commission chose Du Pont Corporation to build and operate the Savannah River Plant, a vast industrial site dedicated to producing plutonium and tritium for the hydrogen bomb. Encompassing over 200,000 acres and employing a permanent operations staff of 6,000, the Savannah River Plant had a significant impact on the region. The arrival of thousands of highly trained scientists and engineers and their families spurred the creation of sprawling suburbs and hastened the arrival of national department store chains. A significant portion of these new residents came from outside the South, bringing with them political traditions and beliefs unencumbered by the peculiar forces of southern history. Their political activities in this region of South Carolina were, however, influenced by the newcomers' specific Cold War environment. The particular political changes that befell the region were shaped by Du Pont's specific corporate culture. Corporate America was a key player in the Cold War. On the national level, the ideas and actions of elite business leaders were critical in shaping President Dwight Eisenhower's Cold War policies and were crucial to the evolution of American culture during this period.<sup>3</sup> Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* magazine, had recruited corporate leaders to the Cold War cause in 1947, calling corporations the "front line soldiers and battalions in the battle of freedom."<sup>4</sup> Du Pont arrived in South Carolina, ready to do battle in the Cold War. With 150 years of industrial experience, a complex reputation, and a well-defined corporate culture that privileged modernization and innovation, Du Pont and its employees had a dramatic effect on the region, particularly its politics. During the 1950s and 1960s, Du Pont employees were instrumental in creating a more efficient and transparent



city government, as well as a vibrant two-party system in a region that, for the previous 80 years, had been dominated by the Democratic Party.



The history of E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Company is intertwined with the history of the nation. Founded in 1802 on the banks of Brandywine Creek near Wilmington, Delaware, Du Pont is one of the nation's oldest companies. Originally a manufacturer of gun powder, Du Pont received its first government contract from President Thomas Jefferson. It was the beginning of a long relationship. Du Pont gun powder was used in the War of 1812, the Mexican American War, and the American Civil War. Pioneers used Du Pont powder to clear the wilderness for settlement, build railroads, raise factories.<sup>5</sup> During World War I, Du Pont supplied 40 percent of all the powder used by the Allied powers, chalking up more than \$1 billion in sales.<sup>6</sup> Such unseemly profits came under the scrutiny of the Senate Munitions Investigation Committee—more popularly known as the Nye Committee—which investigated the cause of America's involvement in the First World War. The committee's final report harshly criticized Du Pont's excessive wartime profits, and the company whose very success was tied to the country's own had earned a grisly, new nickname: "merchants of death." Du Pont worked hard to rid itself of this public relations disaster, downplaying its munitions production and turning to the research and development of consumer and consumer-related products, like nylon, cellophane, and Freon.<sup>7</sup>

But World War II drew Du Pont back to its munitions roots and back to government contracts. Du Pont built and maintained the Hanford Engineering Works, part of the Manhattan Project, and was responsible for creating weapons-grade plutonium that went into the bomb used in the Trinity test and the "Fat Man" bomb dropped on Nagasaki. Eager to avoid the label "war profiteer," Du Pont agreed to participate in the project under two conditions: one, that the company would not make any profits from its association with the atomic project; and two, that any patents resulting from the work accomplished would become the property of the federal government. The government agreed to both conditions, paying Du Pont one dollar a year over costs for its contribution.

Following the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, Du Pont expressed reluctance to continue at the center of the nation's weapons complex. In 1946, the company turned over the maintenance of the Hanford works to General Electric. In the postwar era, Du Pont invested heavily in

research and development, particularly of consumer products and textiles. By 1952, it offered more than 100 products in a wide range of industries. Readily accepting Henry Luce's earlier corporate call to arms, Du Pont positioned itself as the provider of a veritable cornucopia of products, and created a patriotic perception of itself that did not rely on the production of munitions. President Eisenhower in particular embraced this perspective in his foreign policy, expanding it to characterize the nation at large in its global struggle with Communism. With companies like Du Pont in the lead, America would be the provider of goods and services superior to those offered by the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup>

But world events soon overtook the company. On the morning of September 23, 1949, armed with scientific data from American and British experts, a somber President Harry Truman informed the nation that the Soviets had exploded an atomic bomb. In four short years, America's nuclear monopoly was ended. The world had become a much more dangerous place.

The discovery that the Soviet Union possessed nuclear capabilities escalated discussions at the nation's highest levels over whether the United States should proceed with the production of the hydrogen bomb, a thermonuclear device whose destructive capabilities were projected to be one hundred times greater than those of the existing atomic weapons. On January 31, 1950, Truman authorized an accelerated program to develop the hydrogen bomb.<sup>9</sup> To build this new plant, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) turned to Du Pont.<sup>10</sup> Du Pont executives remained anxious to avoid anything that might revive the "merchants of death" stigma. But the federal government persisted. Said one atomic energy expert, "To ask anybody else to build the plant when you could get Du Pont would be like settling for a rookie when you could get Babe Ruth in his prime."<sup>11</sup> Du Pont relented.

In mid-1950, AEC and Du Pont officials criss-crossed the country, investigating some 114 potential production sites.<sup>12</sup> The ideal location would combine "low population density, proximity to a fairly large urban center, a local labor supply, and an adequate supply of water of specified purity."<sup>13</sup> Their assignment acquired heightened urgency when, in the early hours of Sunday morning, June 25, 1950, thousands of North Koreans poured southward over the 38th parallel. The Korean War had begun. Five months later, on November 28, 1950, only a few days after Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River, threatening to turn the Korean conflict into a larger Asian land war, the AEC announced that it had chosen a South Carolina site that bordered the Savannah River along the western edge of the state.<sup>14</sup> A massive undertaking, the plant, ultimately known as the Savannah River Plant,



would encompass great swaths of land in Aiken, Barnwell, and Allendale Counties.<sup>15</sup>

The tri-county region out of which the Savannah River Plant was to be carved was already undergoing change in the late 1940s, before AEC officials arrived. The declining cotton economy of large land owners and sharecroppers had begun to give way to a more diversified agricultural mix.<sup>16</sup> The rural areas of Aiken County had lost population since 1940, with sharecroppers in particular leaving in droves during the decade. The scores of vacant farm houses bore testimony to the region's decline.<sup>17</sup> This small human tributary joined the larger rushing torrent of four million — a quarter of the region's farm population — that left the South during the war years. Horse Creek Valley — known to locals as "the Valley" — stretched across the county's northwest quadrant. Home to some of the South's oldest textile mills and mill villages, the Valley likewise had entered a period of transition during the 1940s and early 1950s.

Whereas depopulation and transition characterized the countryside and mill villages, the city of Aiken retained much of its nineteenth-century charm. Though Aiken lay only a few miles outside the Valley and numerous rural hamlets, the residents of the farms, the mill villages, and Aiken lived in different worlds. Incorporated in 1835, Aiken boasted a population of only 7,000 on the eve of the plant's construction.<sup>18</sup> Prior to 1950, Aiken existed peacefully as a wealthy enclave, serving the needs and whims of the nation's upper crust. Mrs. Lulie Hitchcock of Long Island came to Aiken in the 1870s after she discovered that its temperate climate and sandy soil were ideal for raising and training thoroughbreds. Mrs. Hitchcock and her husband owned a stable of race horses and they brought their equine passion to Aiken. She soon convinced many of her wealthy friends in the horsey set to make Aiken their winter home. Collectively they became known as the "Winter Colonists"; they typically arrived in January and left in April. They built sprawling mansions that they called "cottages," and which they christened with names — some stately, some whimsical — like "Rosehill," "Whitehall," "Banksia" and "Joye Cottage."<sup>19</sup> The cottages lined the beautifully landscaped 150-foot-wide boulevards. Dividing the boulevards were lovely parks, lush with towering magnolias and filled with the riotous color of that magnificent southern trifecta of dogwoods, camellias, and azaleas. The city proudly adopted the slogan the City of Parkways. Most of these broad avenues were still unpaved in 1950, out of consideration for the sensitivity of horses' hooves.<sup>20</sup> The horses of some of the nation's leading racing stables, the majority of which were owned by northerners, wintered in

Aiken. Many Kentucky Derby winners held their debuts at the annual Aiken trials, on the beautifully laid-out Mile Track.

Novelist Pat Conroy once observed that Aiken was socially schizophrenic, a town of well-defined categories and an obvious pecking order. The Winter Colonists stood high above the “Old Aikenites”—the town’s merchants and politicians whose families had lived in Aiken for generations and whose livelihood depended on the Winter Colonists; both groups considered themselves superior to the mill folk of the Valley. Politically, however, Aiken—like the rest of South Carolina—was solidly Democratic.

The demographic and economic impact of the Savannah River Plant on this primarily rural region was profound and is relatively easy to document. Between 1950 and 1952, more than 30,000 temporary construction workers and 6,000 permanent employees and their families, as well as proprietors of businesses and services that catered to the plant personnel—nearly 180,000 persons in all—flooded into the region.<sup>21</sup> Even though the Savannah River Plant was crucial to the national security state’s expanding nuclear arsenal, and although the Korean War had presented the specter of a constant state of total war, the Truman administration rejected the garrison state. They chose not to impose excessive controls by the federal government or the military and decided to rely instead on existing cities, such as Aiken, and private enterprise to absorb the new residents. Ultimately, two-thirds of the permanent employees—managers, scientists, engineers, and technicians—chose to live in and around Aiken. By 1953, the city’s permanent population had tripled. The city’s square mileage had grown 139 percent as a result of suburban annexation and development. Private developers created twenty-seven new “modern and convenient” subdivisions within commuting distance of the plant. The town hired eighty additional teachers in 1952 and added 40 permanent classrooms and 36 temporary classrooms. The Savannah River Plant commenced operations in late 1952, and the first shipment of plutonium left the plant in December 1954. The region, which at the close of World War II was categorized as underdeveloped and primarily rural, now represented an important outpost on the frontier of nuclear science as well as an integral component of the national defense state.

But sheer numbers do not convey the impact of the Savannah River Plant on this region of South Carolina. As important in determining the shape of change was Du Pont’s specific corporate culture. Intent on promoting itself primarily as an innovator and creator of consumer products, such as nylon and cellophane, and downplaying its role in weapons manufacturing, Du Pont had crafted a culture that heralded scientific discovery, innovation, and creativity, and that emphasized consumption and material



well-being as the cornerstone of a free people. Shaping this culture from the top was company president Crawford Greenewalt, who personified the company's emphasis on innovation and achievement. A graduate of MIT and a chemical engineer by training, Greenewalt was technical director of Du Pont's Graselli Chemical Department. He was among a tiny group of civilians invited to the University of Chicago in 1942 to witness the first nuclear reaction. After Du Pont joined the Manhattan Project, the company's president chose Greenewalt to serve as liaison at Hanford between the production team and the physicists. When he took over management of the Hanford project, the nuclear physicists were suspicious of him because he was not a nuclear physicist. Greenewalt boned up so well on nuclear physics that in six months he could talk to the scientists in their own language. He was such a quick study, in fact, that when Du Pont turned the operation of Hanford over to GE after the war, pioneering atomic scientist Enrico Fermi asked Greenewalt to quit Du Pont and devote his life to pure research.<sup>22</sup> Greenewalt's wartime managerial success, in addition to his marriage to the daughter of former company president Irene Du Pont, thrust him into the corporate limelight, and in 1948, he became one of the youngest men (as well as only the second non-blood relative) to become president of Du Pont.

Greenewalt possessed a restless mind and creative spirit. An accomplished musician, he played the clarinet, cello, and piano; he built model steam engines, grew orchids, and developed high-speed photographic equipment to study hummingbirds. Greenewalt had a hand in crafting the company's corporate structure, which likewise reflected its emphasis on innovation. Du Pont's industrial operations were divided into ten departments directing such diverse projects as electrochemicals, explosives, and rayon. Du Pont frequently switched employees among departments to "cross-fertilize" the company and to broaden the employees' experience. For example, an organic chemist might be put in charge of sales, where he was left to sink or swim. Within these positions, employees and managers were given great latitude. If the manager did a good job, the general staff did not meddle.

Because of Du Pont's concerns about image and its desire to foreground its consumer products, Greenewalt maintained a very high profile, and the public record of his thoughts concerning science, the scientist, and society is voluminous. Science, Greenewalt proclaimed, was "the source of [our] national strength, of material progress, of added leisure, and of enriched cultural opportunities."<sup>23</sup> Science relied on creativity; it also was a communal effort in which no idea is ever lost or destroyed.<sup>24</sup> And the creative process, of course, relied on intellectual freedom.<sup>25</sup> As innovators and

problem-solvers, scientists, Greenewalt argued, had a duty to contribute to civic life.<sup>26</sup> This belief applied to Du Pont employees in particular. Greenewalt consistently remarked on the potential of research and innovation to improve Americans' material well-being, and encouraged his employees to expand their creativity to pursuits beyond the laboratory. He and other corporate leaders put their industrial pursuits into a larger Cold War context. Improvement in the material status of mankind can proceed only in a free society, and innovation and creativity in science can take place only where there are no restrictions placed on freedom of thought. This freedom extended beyond the laboratory to participation in democratic institutions. Greenewalt's philosophy about the role of scientists in society jibed with a general faith in scientists, a belief that they might legitimately offer expertise not only as scientists, but might weigh in on a number of policy issues. Greenewalt consistently maintained that leaders of industry and business had a responsibility to involve themselves in political affairs, and Du Pont regularly urged its employees to be politically active.<sup>27</sup>

Potential employees were attracted to Du Pont because of its diverse industrial profile, its emphasis on research and development, and the potential for growth and experience within the company. Two highly sought-after young scientists — chemist Mal McKibben and nuclear physicist Walt Joseph — are good examples of the Du Pont scientists of the 1950s. With his B.S. in chemistry from Emory University, McKibben considered an offer from Chemstrand Corporation. Later, after joining the Savannah River Plant, he received offers from General Electric, the International Atomic Energy Commission, and Allied General Nuclear Services. Joseph, then a doctoral student in nuclear physics at the University of Pennsylvania, was interviewed twice by what he assumes was the Central Intelligence Agency. Both chose Du Pont because of its wide range of consumer products, its focus on pure research, and its reputation as an innovator. As McKibben stated frankly, "Du Pont was Cadillac, the others were Fords." Now retired, neither is disappointed in his career path. Both men recalled the sense of excitement and discovery that pervaded their work at the Savannah River Plant. Recalls McKibben, "We were always encouraged to think creatively, and we were given the latitude necessary to solve problems. Many employees extended this creativity and problem-solving ability outside the plant."<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the Savannah River Plant was different from Du Pont's other manufacturing concerns. Because it was dedicated to developing components for the hydrogen bomb, secrecy and security inside the plant were paramount. Nonetheless, within the parameters laid down by the AEC, Du Pont still found ways to "cross fertilize." Nuclear physicist Joseph was as-



signed to no fewer than eight different divisions within the plant during his long tenure. At one point, he was put in charge of plant traffic. Chemist McKibben was moved from heavy-water production to fuel and target fabrication to separations — all extremely different processes — while employed by the company.<sup>29</sup> Outside of the plant, employees were forbidden to talk about their work. Employee Ronnie Bryant noted that he and his fellow workers in the heavy-water production sector joked that, when asked about their jobs, they would reply that they were making lipstick. Turning more serious, Bryant observed that the constant reminders not to talk about your work outside the plant “made us feel that what we were doing was really important.”<sup>30</sup> Spouses and children were kept in the dark regarding the work that was done at the site. Du Pont acknowledged that such secrecy could cause tension at home. In a “memo for housewives,” the company told spouses of plant employees that even dinner-table conversation about the plant was potentially dangerous. “SRP is not an ordinary plant,” Du Pont reminded the wives of workers. “Its mission is national defense; its job is important and secret.”<sup>31</sup> Such extreme secrecy in a time of heightened international tension caused stress for area families. Children often came up with imaginative explanations for the secrecy that invaded their family lives. Walt Joseph’s son recalled that “[My father’s] job and work were not the topics of conversation at our dinner table. He left in the early hours of the morning, riding with a group of other men in a carpool, and came home just in time for dinner. Some weekends there would be a late night phone call and he would leave for work in the middle of the night. . . . Every few weeks, . . . my mother, my sister, and I would get in the car in the early evening and drive to pick my father up, and when we did we picked him up at a barber shop in a shopping center on the highway which ran from Aiken to New Ellenton. This was the only business I could associate my father with in the first six years of my life, so I made the logical assumption. My father was a barber.”<sup>32</sup>

Everything about the plant seemed to dictate that it existed as an entity wholly separate from the surrounding communities. It was located in a remote region. It sat on 325 square miles of real estate — roughly the size of the city of Chicago. Plant operations and administrative buildings were secluded behind miles of wooded buffer. Traffic streamed into the plant in the morning and out at night. Employees needed an identification badge to enter. It was a curious, secret place. Nevertheless, this insistence upon secrecy and security, rather than isolating the employees and heightening the distance between employees and town, actually facilitated community involvement. For many, the sense of mission that accompanied their work did not stop when they left the workplace. Many took seriously Greenewalt’s — and

Du Pont's — notion about their role in improving the standard of living. "Better living" — a well-known Du Pont slogan — was achieved not only through the acquisition of consumer goods, but through the creation and improvement of community institutions. Recalled Walt Joseph, "it was expected that you were involved in civic affairs."<sup>33</sup>

Within the larger Aiken community, these scientists and engineers were referred to collectively not as Savannah River Plant employees but as "Du Ponters." The identification with the company was that strong. Buzz Rich, an Aiken attorney whose family moved to the region in the early 1950s and whose mother worked at the plant, recalled the impact of the Du Pont employees on the region. "All those Du Ponters had a lot of energy, . . . all that brain power, coming into that small southern town. They had time on their hands, in the evenings and weekends. . . . [T]hey got involved and started all of these activities."<sup>34</sup> Owen Clary, who grew up in the town of Warrenville in the Valley and who eventually worked for the Savannah River Plant before heading up a local food bank, remarked that many of the Du Pont employees were civic-minded. "They were generous with their time and always volunteered for fundraising activities."<sup>35</sup> The activities of Du Pont employees were covered in the local newspaper and highlighted in the company newsletter, the Savannah River News. Du Pont employees started the community theater group, the United Way, and the Rotary Club, and raised money for a new library. Despite their recent arrival, employees of the plant were instrumental in organizing the area's first historical society, with the plant's official historian listed as its first secretary. Plant supervisors and employees worked very hard to relate their work to the community at large. Farmers of Aiken County flocked to a public program on radioisotopes and their applicability to agricultural research.<sup>36</sup> The YWCA sponsored a popular lecture series on subjects that ranged from the nature of matter to nuclear reactors. Over 600 school teachers attended an all-day seminar on the incorporation of atomic energy into the school curriculum. Employees founded local chapters of their professional associations and made them relevant to the community. For example, the Savannah River Subsection of the American Chemical Society contributed \$125 for science books for the local high school and counseled students on careers in chemistry and atomic energy.<sup>37</sup> Arthur Tackman, assistant manager of the Savannah River Plant, was named Aiken County "Citizen of the Year" for 1953. He had served as campaign chairman of the American Red Cross–Community Chest, coordinator of committees of the Cotton Festival, and chairman of the Boy Scouts in the area. He had only been a resident of the area for two



years.<sup>38</sup> SRP employees provided volunteer labor to build a public swimming pool in nearby Williston, and SRP employees organized and staffed various suburban fire departments. By 1955, only five years after the decision to build the plant was made, Du Pont employees were either leading or participating in the major community institutions in Aiken.

Following Greenewalt's advice, employees likewise became involved in the city's political institutions, initiating innovations that were based on their desire for modern, efficient, representative government. The majority of Du Pont's permanent operations staff took up residence in Aiken's burgeoning suburbs. To bring order to development chaos, these new neighborhoods organized themselves into civic associations that would regularly and collectively bring their particular issues before the city council. The first such group organized was the Crosland Park Civic Association, the first suburb built to house plant employees.

These new civic associations were in the forefront of promoting a change from the extant commission form of city government to a city manager system. Crosland Park Civic Association took the lead among newcomers in supporting the transition to a full-time city manager system which, residents believed, "contain[ed] sound principles of efficient city administration. . . ." A full-time city manager would be better equipped to handle the problems associated with rapid growth, something Crosland Park residents knew only too well. The 500-plus home subdivision was cursed with chronic sewage overflow, a complaint regularly brought before the city council.<sup>39</sup> Crosland Park residents likewise supported the "appointment of city employees on the basis of merit apart from political considerations or influence," as well as "planning and zoning provisions which provide for orderly growth, stabilize property values, and protect the citizens of Aiken from the inconvenience, danger, and expense which can result from irresponsible real property development." Finally, the association called for "a carefully developed system of public hearings which assure that the citizens of Aiken shall have the opportunity to be heard in matters of basic policy determination." By calling for a merit system and a transparent decision-making process, the new residents were advocating not only for a more democratic and representative government, but for a process that in many ways resembled the scientific process, in which all variables are carefully weighed.<sup>40</sup> Aiken voters overwhelming approved the adoption of the city manager system.<sup>41</sup> The arrival of the plant and its thousands of employees likewise precipitated a more visual change in the city's identity. By the mid-1950s, the city's crest reflected its new, modern identity: joining images of a golfer,

a thoroughbred, and a plantation home was the symbol for nuclear energy with the word “progress” emblazoned across it.

Du Pont employees likewise were instrumental in lending support to Republican candidates in national elections and in organizing the first county-level Republican Party. South Carolina’s one-party system grew out of historical racial and political animosities. Since Reconstruction, the Republican Party had been anathema to South Carolina’s white voters. The Republican Party became synonymous with “negro control,” and the return to Democratic Party rule in the 1870s was marred by violence, perhaps none worse than in western South Carolina. Aiken County alone witnessed two of the worst race riots in state history in 1876. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, South Carolina was the region’s most reliably Democratic state, refusing to bolt along with its sister states in 1928, and polling huge numbers for Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s. The Republicans rarely fielded candidates for office even at the highest levels, and the Democrats utterly dominated local politics in all forty-six counties. Against such daunting odds, the fate of the state Republican Party was sealed. According to one account, by mid-century, “the South Carolina GOP was merely a quaint relic of the past, widely accused of graft, corruption, and gross mismanagement.”<sup>42</sup>

Political scientists have noted how, in the postwar era, residents of the urban and suburban South “gradually began to identify their economic interests as resting with the Republican Party.”<sup>43</sup> As Aiken’s population exploded with the creation of the Savannah River Plant, they joined the growing numbers of urban and suburban residents across the South as they pulled the lever for Dwight Eisenhower and other Republican candidates. In 1952 in South Carolina, Eisenhower drew support from wealthier whites in the urban and suburban areas, as well as more race-conscious whites in the low country who were disturbed at the role of civil rights in the Democratic Party platforms of the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1956, in the wake of the *Brown* decision (in which the Eisenhower administration submitted an *amicus curiae* brief supporting the NAACP’s position), Eisenhower lost much of his race-based low country support. Dissatisfied with the president’s position on race, whites living in majority black counties threw their votes to unpledged electors. In fact, the only county the Republican president carried in 1956 was Aiken. Led by the county’s new residents, the Republicanism of Aiken County was shaped by an opposition to New Deal-style liberalism rather than an overt racism. The party leadership reflected the more cosmopolitan nature of the rank and file, with most key leaders coming from out of state.<sup>44</sup>



Not content to express their Republican sensibilities in presidential elections alone, Republicans in Aiken, led by Du Pont employees, built the party from the roots up, and by the late 1950s they were contesting seats on the city council. Their affiliation with the Republican Party was as much ideological as it was practical: the local Democratic Party appeared to many to be a “closed” body of established elites, so the Republican Party simply offered a vehicle for involvement. Efforts to organize the party on the county level occurred in the early 1960s. SRP employee Walt Joseph remembers the first Aiken County Republican Party Convention. “The law required political conventions to be held in public buildings so the group reserved the courthouse for the designated evening. When the small band of party faithful arrived for the convention, they discovered the courthouse dark and locked. Repeated attempts to phone the building custodian and other political figures were unsuccessful. Finally, in desperation, but within the letter of the law, the convention was held in the courthouse parking lot.” In 1967, Aiken County became the first county in South Carolina to hold a Republican primary.<sup>45</sup>

By the early 1960s, the state Republican Party had been transformed, drawing strength from expanding suburban areas in Aiken, Richland, and Charleston Counties and their middle- and upper-middle-class residents. Contemporary commentators observed that presidential Republicanism in South Carolina was stronger than that in any other southern state.<sup>46</sup> In the presidential election of 1960, Republican candidate Richard Nixon lost the state by fewer than 10,000 votes, and 63.2 percent of all city and suburban residents voted Republican.<sup>47</sup> South Carolina Republicans adopted a brand of conservatism that mirrored in important respects the conservatism taking hold in the country as a whole during this period. Popular conservative themes included concerns about the influence of organized labor, the conduct of the Cold War, and the burgeoning civil rights movement. Republican Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona was the poster child of this new conservatism, and he enjoyed widespread popularity among South Carolina Republicans.

By 1962, the state Republican Party felt confident enough to take on three-term U.S. Senator Olin D. Johnston. Johnston’s political credentials were formidable. Elected governor in 1934 and 1942, Johnston had served as the state’s senator since 1945. He was a reliable New Deal Democrat, a strong supporter of organized labor and the limited welfare state. Johnston had remained a loyal—if not enthusiastic—supporter of Harry Truman in the presidential election of 1948, when many states’ rights conservatives in South Carolina bolted the party over the Democrats’

civil rights platform. Likewise, Johnston had remained in the Democratic camp during the tumultuous 1950s, when many disgruntled southern Democrats voted as independents.<sup>48</sup>

The Republicans nominated well-known syndicated newspaper columnist William D. Workman to run against Johnston. A life-long newspaper man, the 47-year-old Workman had always maintained a politically neutral position. However, in a letter to Barry Goldwater, Workman revealed that he had “opposed the [national] Democratic tickets since Roosevelt’s second term.”<sup>49</sup> Devising a winning strategy proved difficult for the South Carolina Republicans. They considered trying to yoke Johnston to liberal president John Kennedy and the increasingly disruptive civil rights movement, but painting Johnston as a racial liberal was futile. Although hardly a virulent white supremacist, he had established his anti-civil rights credentials in the 1940s and had not wavered since. Although this was his first try at public office, Workman’s conservative criticisms of the civil rights movement and the welfare state were well known. Those not familiar with Workman’s journalism could familiarize themselves with his racial views by reading *A Case for the South*, published in 1960. Declaring his position to be that of “the [white] man in the middle,” *A Case for the South* is Workman’s attempt to explain the white South’s opposition to integration. Workman’s “case” was built on the tired, time-worn arguments of southern apologists: that hundreds of years of cohabitation had given southern whites special insight into the nature of the black man; that African Americans, as a whole were an adolescent race only recently moving into civic adulthood; and that southern whites were most capable of directing their own racial affairs without interference from the courts or the federal government.<sup>50</sup> Having made his own position clear, Workman stated confidentially on a number of occasions that he did not wish to bring race into the campaign. Most likely this was because it was not an issue with which he could attack Johnston. Johnston deftly kept his distance from certain elements of Kennedy’s program, telling South Carolina voters that he never supported civil rights measures or “wasteful foreign aid give-aways.”<sup>51</sup>

Unwilling to take on Johnston directly, Workman attacked liberalism generally and Washington liberals in particular, whom he called a “group of arrogant intellectuals surrounding the Kennedy clan...”<sup>52</sup> Workman railed against the evils of an activist federal government with its expansive, meddling bureaucracy, which he considered one step away from Communism. He opposed federal aid to education, as well as any federal intervention into health care for the elderly. The expanding welfare state had become “cradle to the grave protection . . . indulgence by the federal government at



taxpayers' expense."<sup>53</sup> He endorsed "national defense to whatever degree and at whatever cost is essential to the security of the United States," and championed an unrelenting resistance to world Communism. One Workman advertisement criticized Johnston for supporting arms control and disarmament, warning voters that by advocating arms reduction Johnston threatened national sovereignty and supported the notion of a Soviet superstate.<sup>54</sup> Such heated rhetoric was red meat to defense workers on the front lines of the Cold War. An arms agreement threatened the livelihood of folks who made their livings developing materials for the hydrogen bomb. Workman did his best to craft his message in the Goldwater mold, making his campaign part of the broader push for "a new conservatism which is spreading throughout America," which sought to stem "the liberal tide which has been sweeping the United States toward the murky depths of socialism."<sup>55</sup>

In Aiken County, Savannah River Plant and Atomic Energy Commission employees became heavily involved in Workman's campaign. Gus Robinson, who worked in the Atomic Energy Commission's Office of Public Information, and Don Law, editor of the *Savannah River Plant News*, provided key information on the political temper of plant employees, assuring Workman that they could "predict good a Republican vote . . . from AEC and DuPont personnel."<sup>56</sup> Plant physicist Walt Joseph served as a precinct captain for Workman, while North Augusta — a town heavily populated by plant personnel — was considered a lock for the challenger.<sup>57</sup>

Workman made an impressive showing in an improbable race, garnering 44 percent of the statewide vote from an electorate that only a decade before had possessed an almost visceral distaste for all things Republican. Aiken County was one of only three counties to give a majority of votes to Workman.<sup>58</sup> His most lopsided victories within the county came from precincts in Aiken and North Augusta heavily populated by middle-class plant personnel.<sup>59</sup>

Although defeated, South Carolina Republicans had made tremendous strides in building their party, and they looked forward to the presidential contest of 1964. In September of that year, U.S. Senator and Aiken resident Strom Thurmond announced he was leaving the Democratic Party and joining the Republicans to support standard-bearer Barry Goldwater. Thurmond's party switch was a tremendous coup for South Carolina's Republicans. Garnering the affiliation of the state's most popular politician lent the fledgling party instant credibility. Many observers have since credited Thurmond with bringing two-party politics to the state; however, a closer look demands that more credit be given to party operatives, changing

demographics, and the 1962 campaign in making Thurmond's switch something less than suicidal. Ever the astute politician, Thurmond no doubt had observed the changes in the political terrain wrought by the Cold War. After leaving the governor's mansion and losing the race for U.S. Senate to Olin Johnston in 1950, Thurmond settled in Aiken, joining a local law firm. For the next several years, he represented numerous landowners displaced by the Savannah River Plant in their quest for what they considered more equitable appraisals of their property. Although a private citizen, Thurmond was never out of the public eye, appearing frequently at community events. His professional and possibly his social circle came to involve individuals from the Savannah River Plant. And although it is impossible to know the extent to which he was influenced by the burgeoning Republican sentiment in Aiken, he was certainly aware of it. Within this context, then, Thurmond's switch seems less an example of political soothsaying than a well-timed and sensible political accommodation. Although Thurmond and his aides always maintained that the senator's high-profile switch was a singular act of political bravery, former aid Harry Dent confided to Thurmond's biographer that Workman's challenge to Johnston in 1962 provided "a pretty good poll" of potential Republican support.<sup>60</sup>



The onset of the Cold War and the disbursement of billions of dollars in federal funds through the military-industrial complex transformed regions of the American South in countless ways. In the once sparsely populated, mostly rural region of western South Carolina, the arrival of thousands of highly educated scientists and engineers heralded the beginning of a process to break down the political parochialism of the South. Just as New Deal labor legislation initiated the decline of the South's economic isolation, so too did the influx of the corporate Cold War footsoldiers mark the beginning of the end of the South's political isolation. In Aiken, South Carolina, the thrust for civic involvement and institution-building seemed to evolve naturally from Du Pont's internal culture and the larger culture of the Cold War. Perhaps what is most surprising about the transition of Aiken from a sleepy, wealthy enclave to bustling small city was not *that* it happened, but how quickly change came to this one community. By all accounts the early years of the plant (essentially 1950–1957) were frantic. The pressure to develop the hydrogen bomb and expand the nation's nuclear arsenal was enormous. In this harried context, such a high level of civic involvement makes sense only from the perspective of the employees themselves, who viewed community involvement as an integral part of their



overall mission. The result was a more modern South. The efforts of plant employees to create a viable Republican Party laid the critical groundwork for a two-party system in a region that had not known true political competition since the nineteenth century. The creation of a more democratic, competitive political system in which the local Republican Party drew on themes resonating in communities around the nation ultimately made the South less peculiar, and more like the rest of the country.

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KARI FREDERICKSON

## Creating a "Respectable Area": Southerners and the Cold War

When Strom Thurmond and a host of future political leaders returned to the American South following their service overseas in World War II, they came home determined to remake the South in a more progressive mold. Intense and prolonged interaction with men from other regions of the country and immersion in the large and powerful armed forces bureaucracy shaped their thinking about the future of the South in new and profound ways. Convinced that the South lagged behind the rest of the nation economically, and that the South's stunted, colonial economy had perpetuated the political control of an entrenched moss-back elite committed to low-wage extractive industries, men like Thurmond were equally convinced that the road to economic transformation was paved with federal dollars. Many of these new funds were funneled through the military-industrial complex. As the South's political leaders from the late 1940s through the 1980s (and, in Thurmond's case, into the next century), these men were consistent supporters of a strong military and a foreign policy that took a hard line in its dealings with Communist nations.<sup>1</sup>

As a regional historian, it is not at all surprising that I take as orthodox the notion that the peculiar, historic forces that shaped and defined the South likewise played an important role in determining the foreign policy positions of its political leaders. Their support for a strong military, as Andy Fry notes, was predicated in part on the economic benefits that the expansion of the military industrial complex brought to their communities and states. By the early 1970s, the Southern states were providing the Pentagon with 52 percent of its ships, 46 percent of its airframes, 42 percent of its petroleum products, and 27 percent of its ammunition.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Southern states and the national security state was strong and vital.

1. James C. Cobb, "World War II and the Mind of the Modern South," in *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South*, ed. Neil R. McMillen (Jackson, MS, 1997); Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1964* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 171.

2. Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the American South, 1938-1980* (Durham, NC, 1994), 136; Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, and Sabina Deitrick, *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York, 1991); "Southern Militarism," *Southern Exposure* (Spring 1973): 61.



Having spent the better part of the last ten years examining how decisions regarding the expansion of the arms race affected Southern communities, I would argue for a further refinement of this position. Military contracts and Cold War industrial facilities brought more than jobs: they possessed the power to remake entire regional economies, bringing the fruits of modernization that had alluded the South for so long. From Tenneco's Newport News shipbuilding plant in Hampton Roads, Virginia, to General Dynamics and LTV Corporation in Texas, the military and the federal government created a new high-tech industrial workforce whose cultural tastes, spending habits, and political allegiances changed the face of the South. The arrival of the military-industrial complex into underdeveloped Southern communities helped the region to overcome some of its more unsavory regional attributes. The Cold War made the South less "Southern."

Developments in Strom Thurmond's home state of South Carolina provide examples of how Cold War decision makers at the highest levels took regional patterns into account. In January 1950, on the advice of his special advisory committee, President Harry Truman authorized an accelerated program to develop the hydrogen bomb. The production of the "super" required a new facility to produce plutonium, tritium, and other products. During the spring and summer of 1950, officials from the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and DuPont Corporation (recruited by President Truman to operate the vast weapons complex) crisscrossed the nation, investigating over one hundred potential sites. They ultimately settled on a site in western South Carolina that bordered the Savannah River. While factors, such as the water quality of the Savannah and the drainage properties of the region's sandy soil, played an important role in the decision of where to locate the plant, so too did more historic, particularly Southern, attributes. Of the handful of sites that made it into the final round of consideration, the South Carolina location was notable for its construction wage rates—the lowest among all possible sites. South Carolina's low wage rates reflected the state's historically weak labor movement and hostile antiunion atmosphere. AEC officials responsible for making recommendations regarding the placement of the site likewise noted that most of those living inside the proposed plant boundaries were black tenant farmers. These "colored agricultural workers," noted one official, resided in houses that were of "low value." Removing such residents would be easier than removing residents at alternate sites where property values were higher.<sup>3</sup> Here, government officials

3. "Report to the President by the Special Committee of the National Security Council to the President," January 31, 1950, U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950* (Washington, DC, 1977), 1: 513–23. Site specifics found in C. H. Topping, Engineering Department, E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Company, "Plant 124 Site Survey," November 27, 1950, box H-10-1, series 43, Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Records, Record Group 326, National Archives and Records Administration, Southeast Region, Morrow, Georgia; H. F. Brown to Heads of Departments and Branch Offices, Works, and Divisions of Explosives Department, July 11, 1950, file 7, box 6, subseries C, series II, Acc.

exploited the historically vulnerable position of rural blacks trapped in the economic vice that was the South's tenant system. Such residents possessed neither the financial resources nor the political clout to fight their removal from the land. An awareness of how specific regional characteristics, such as an underpaid skilled labor force and a captive black rural population, played into decisions regarding the expansion of the arms race made at the highest levels of government only lends an appreciation of the complexity of the workings of the national security state.

The dynamic social, cultural, economic, and political transformation that accompanied the arrival of what eventually was called the Savannah River Plant (SRP) helps to explain why leaders such as Thurmond were such strong supporters of the nation's military and of an aggressive anti-Communist foreign policy. Prior to the SRP's arrival, this section of South Carolina was primarily rural, dominated by low-wage jobs in agriculture and textiles, and had one of the most abysmal rates of high school graduation in the state. Within ten years and after the arrival of nearly 25,000 new residents, the region was highly suburbanized, home to several national retail outlets, and boasted more Ph.Ds per capita than any area of the state. Simply put, the new SRP employees remade the region. They improved its schools, created a cornucopia of civic and arts organizations, and revamped the structure of local government, among other developments. They imbued the region with a notion of modernization and progress that even the long-term residents bought into. Recalling the impact of the arrival of scientists and engineers to the town of Aiken, South Carolina, located within commuting distance to the SRP, textile worker Lenwood Melton speculated that their presence had somehow brought the region into the modern era. "It [the plant and the new permanent residents] upgraded things, really, because we had never had that level of people amongst us. When you got those types coming in, and of course, they were more well-to-do [than the textile mill workers and farmers], and they built some fine houses, they brought the shopping malls, they started new churches, they started doing things like big city folks. . . . As far as the community of [greater] Aiken is concerned, it grew up into a very respectable area."<sup>4</sup> As Melton's observation implies, over time, residents saw themselves as members of a progressive, modern community, a new vision of themselves that was intimately tied to their role in the Cold War arms race. This new vision was profoundly shaped by DuPont's corporate culture. DuPont fostered a local culture that privileged modernization, innovation, efficiency, consumption, and civic involvement as indispensable components in the Cold War battle with communism. DuPont relentlessly encouraged the connection between the SRP and the achievement of "the good life." In fact, few

1957, Atomic Energy Division/Savannah River Plant Papers, Hagley Library, Wilmington, Delaware (quotation).

4. Lenwood Melton, interview with author, May 2003, Graniteville, South Carolina.



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corporations in the postwar era better represented the American Cold War promise of economic prosperity through mass consumption than DuPont.

For residents and leaders of South Carolina, support for a strong national defense and a staunchly anti-Communist foreign policy, then, went beyond mere dollars and cents. Their support had a deeper, more nuanced meaning. It spoke to their best hopes for themselves and their community as well as to their sense of their place in the nation.

Charles S. Bullock and Mark Rozell, eds., *The New Politics of the Old South: An Introduction to Southern Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021)

13

## Alabama

### Polarized and Uncompetitive

*David A. Hughes*



Over the past several decades, southern politics have been in a state of partisan flux. Long the sole governing faction in the American South, state Democratic parties began losing their stranglehold on political institutions from the 1980s up through the 2000s (Black and Black 2002). In most southern states, this transitional period led back to one-party control, though this time by Republicans. More recently, however, several southern states have seen the reemergence of two-party competition as urbanization, in-migration, and generational replacement have propelled a more liberal brand of southern Democrats back into a position of genuine competition (Bullock et al. 2019).

For example, Virginia has voted Democratic in every presidential election since 2008, and in 2019, Virginia state Democrats won their first trifecta since 1993.<sup>1</sup> In Georgia in 2020, the Democratic candidate for president won the state's Electoral College votes for the first time since 1992, and in a runoff election held two months later, two Democratic candidates defeated two incumbent Republican U.S. senators to unify Democratic control of the state's Senate seats for the first time since 2003. In other Rim South states like Texas, Florida, and North Carolina, Democrats continue to improve their performance in state elections and threaten Republicans up and down the ticket.

With few exceptions, Alabama has not been among these "New South" states.<sup>2</sup> While its political factions might resemble those where Democrats once again vie for power, looks can be deceiving. The Alabama Republican Party reigns supreme, and its status is under no serious doubt at this time. In what follows, I review modern developments in Alabama politics, including partisanship, elections, factional control of institutions, and issue development. I conclude that while the state experienced a transformational period of democratization in the latter parts of the twentieth



century, its core set of factions and animating political issues have largely remained invariant to changes in partisanship.

### VOTER TURNOUT AND REALIGNMENT

Alabama realigned from the Democratic Party more slowly compared to other southern states (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012). Prior to the 1960s, Jim Crow restrictions on the franchise such as the literacy test limited citizens' ability to register to vote or to cast ballots, especially among African Americans (Key 1949). With the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, however, and with it the requirement that states like Alabama preclear new voting laws with the federal government, participation in Alabama elections swelled (Bullock and Gaddie 2009).

In figure 13.1, we see the percent of the voting-age population (VAP) that cast ballots in each of the presidential and gubernatorial elections held between 1952 and 2020. Between 1952 and 1964, an average of only about 30 percent of the VAP cast ballots in Alabama's presidential elections, and fewer still, only about 17 percent, participated in gubernatorial elections. Following the implementation of the Voting Rights Act, however, turnout increased by approximately 45 percent between the

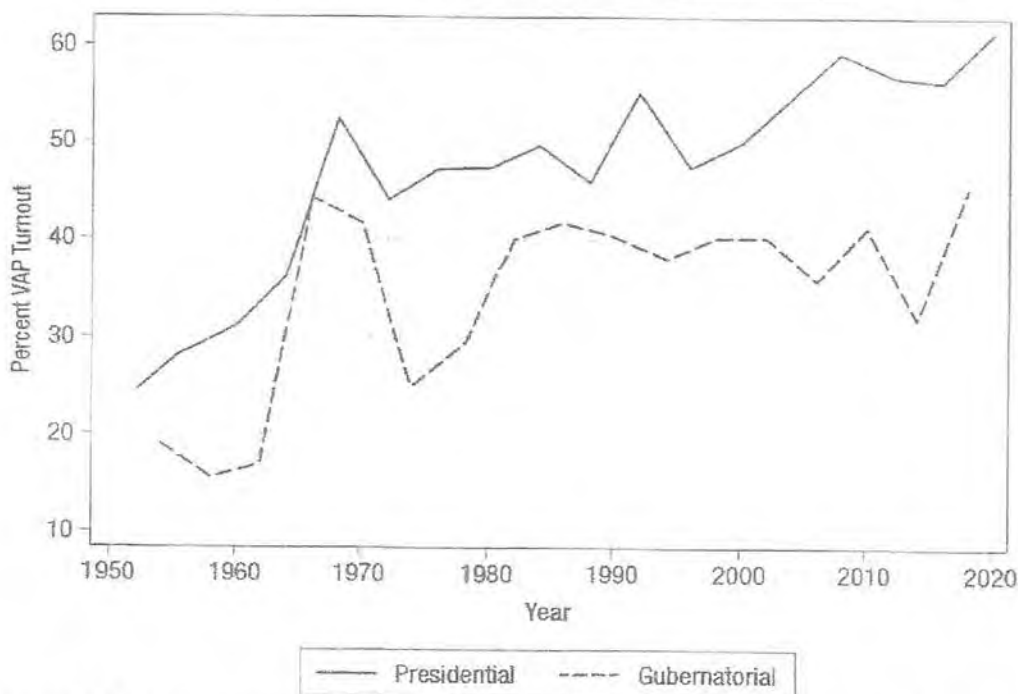


Figure 13.1. Voting age population turnout in Alabama's presidential and gubernatorial elections (1952–2020). Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, The Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1952–2011; and the Alabama Secretary of State's Office, 2011–2020.

1964 and 1968 presidential elections and by a stunning 160 percent between the 1962 and 1966 gubernatorial elections. Furthermore, these gains have been persistent over the years, and in 2020, VAP turnout in the presidential election climbed to a record high of 61 percent.

With Jim Crow barriers to the franchise eliminated, a wave of new voters joined the electorate, and a transformation of Alabama politics was underway. During this period, African American voters overwhelmingly registered to vote as Democrats and increasingly elected representatives who looked like themselves. The first African American state legislators since Reconstruction assumed office in 1971. As seen in figure 13.2, over the next twenty-five years, the proportion of Black legislators in both the Alabama House of Representatives and the Alabama Senate steadily increased until achieving parity with their proportion of the state population.<sup>3</sup> And since 1995, Black Democrats have maintained an average control of nearly 25 percent of state House seats and approximately 22 percent of state Senate seats.<sup>4</sup>

The mobilization of minority voters had a twofold and complementary effect on state politics. First, the increasing participation and representation of African Americans in the Democratic Party transformed it from the party of White supremacy to

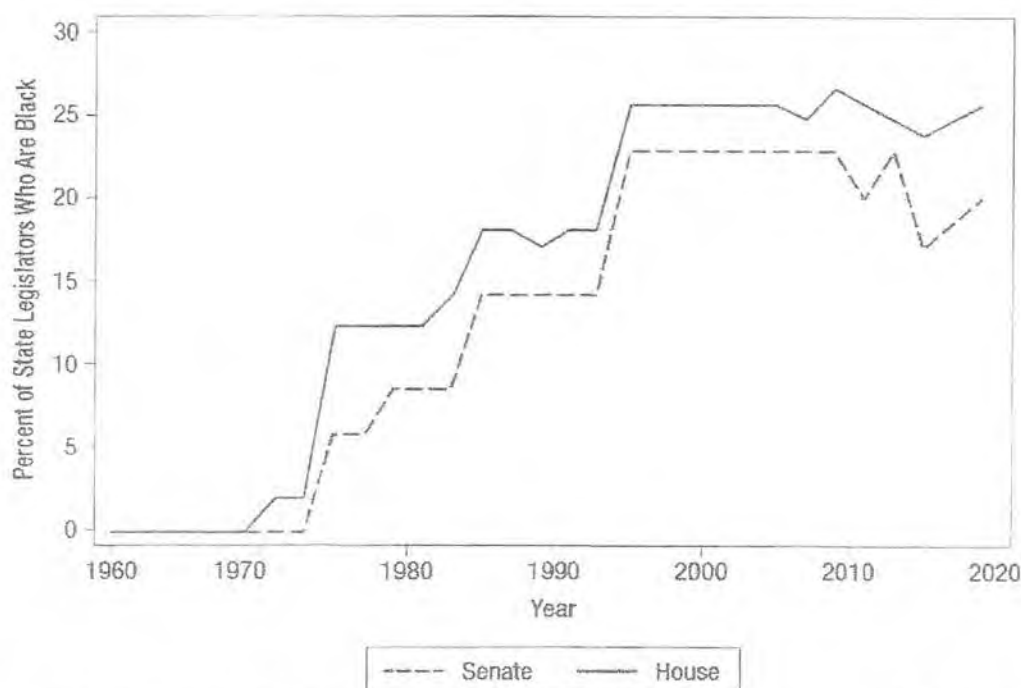


Figure 13.2. Percent of the Alabama legislature's two chambers represented by African Americans (1960–2020). Sources: Bullock and Gaddie (2009), 1960–2007. Remaining years gathered by author.



the party of biracial politics in a remarkably short time (Black and Black 2002). If White politicians wanted to win Democratic primaries, they would need to compete for African Americans' votes, which would require them to moderate their positions on critical issues like race. Indeed, no less a personage than George Wallace built a political coalition for his final, successful, gubernatorial race of 1982 based in no small part upon appealing to the very people he'd victimized as the onetime standard-bearer for White supremacy (Frederick 2007).

Second, the increased presence of African Americans in the Democratic Party caused an exodus of conservative Whites to the Republican Party (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012). During this period, a paradox emerged across the South whereby Democrats—many of whom had ample conservative bona fides from years past—were forced to run more moderate campaigns to win primary elections, but such moderation put them at risk of losing to more conservative, Republican candidates in the general election, particularly in open elections where Democrats could not point to seniority in legislatures as a justification for retention (Black and Black 2002).

These two complementary phenomena—the surge of Black voters and the exodus of White voters—in Democratic politics resulted in a brief period in Alabama between the early 1980s and late 2000s where Democrats and Republicans competed on a nearly equal footing for power. On one side, Democrats organized coalitions of voters largely based on the electoral strategy of George Wallace's 1982 victory. The Wallace coalition laid the groundwork for virtually every statewide Democratic campaign waged since. It consisted of African Americans, labor unions, metropolitan voters, and poorer voters (Cotter and Stovall 2009). On the other side, the Republican coalition consisted overwhelmingly of White voters, especially White Evangelicals, middle- and upper-class voters such as those moving to the suburbs, and business interests as represented by the traditional big males.

Alabama voters first began voting Republican at the top of the ticket before abandoning Democrats at the local level. Figure 13.3 displays support for Democratic performance in state elections. In the left-hand pane is the percent of the vote Democratic candidates for president and governor received in each election between 1952 and 2020. With the exception of the anomalous 1968 election featuring the independent candidacy of George Wallace for president, the steady downward trend in support for state and federal Democrats is clear. Alabama has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1976 and has not elected a Democratic governor since 1998.

Democrats at the local level tended to outperform statewide candidates well into the late 2000s. In the right-hand pane of figure 13.3, we see the share of the Alabama House and Senate controlled by Democrats. Until passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Democrats regularly controlled every legislative seat. Since the 1970s, however, Democrats have lost seats in almost every election cycle, including the most recent ones in 2018 and 2020, due largely to their loss of support among rural White voters. Democrats formally lost control of both chambers of the state legislature in

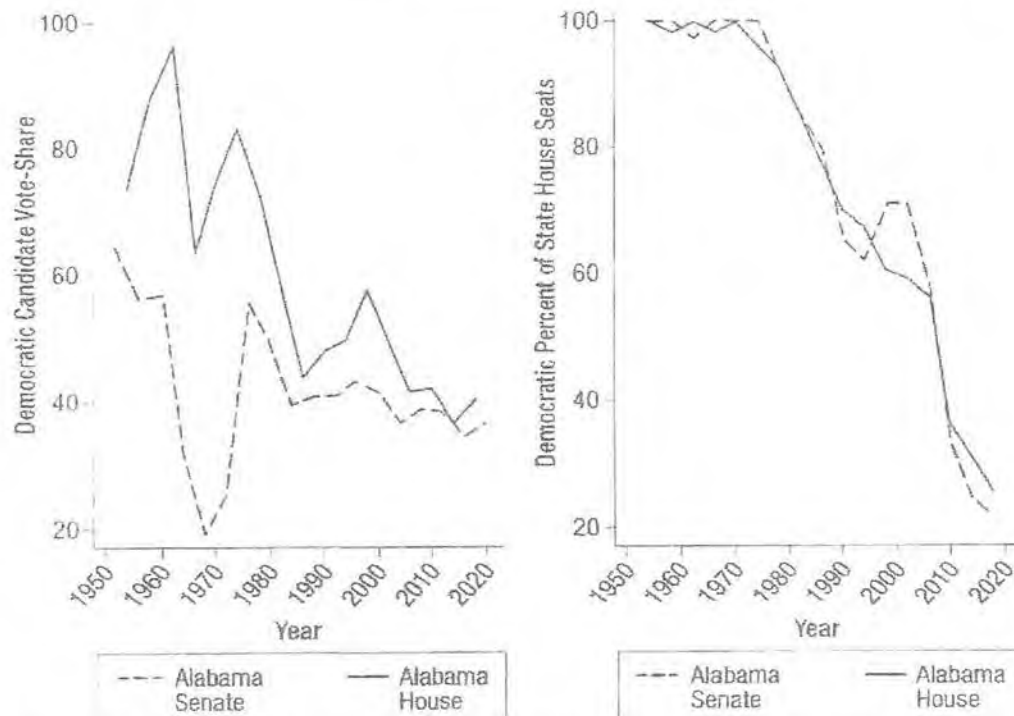


Figure 13.3. Democratic performance in presidential, gubernatorial, and state House and Senate elections (1952–2020). *Sources:* U.S. Census Bureau, *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1952–2011 and the Alabama Secretary of State's Office, 2011–2020.

2010, and today, nearly every Democratic lawmaker is African American and every Republican lawmaker is White.

Despite a series of blunders by Alabama Republicans, today's state Democrats have, with few exceptions, been unable to capitalize on them. In 2016, the Alabama Speaker of the House, Republican Mike Hubbard, was convicted on twelve felony charges related to violations of state ethics law and removed from office (Cason 2016). Later that year, the Alabama Court of the Judiciary removed Republican Roy Moore, the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, from office for his efforts to thwart the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 decision invalidating the state's ban on same-sex marriage (Faulk 2016).<sup>6</sup> And the following year, Republican governor Robert Bentley was forced to resign after pleading guilty to campaign finance violations related to an affair with a member of his staff (Koplowitz 2017).

Despite these missteps, Republicans have paid no discernible electoral penalty with voters. Republicans retained the governorship in 2018 in a twenty-point landslide, increased their supermajorities in the Alabama legislature, and elected a new chief justice who was once a protégé of Roy Moore's (Brown 2018). Republicans control every elected position in the executive branch of government and all nineteen



elected positions on the state's three appellate courts. It controls six out of seven U.S. House seats and both of the state's seats in the U.S. Senate. As of this writing, every statewide position in Alabama is occupied by a Republican.

## MODERN PARTISANSHIP

The changing tides in Alabama elections are reflected by voters' evolving party preferences. In the early 1980s, over half of all Alabamians identified as Democrats compared to fewer than one in five identifying as Republicans. Even as late as 2005, about as many Alabamians identified as Democrats as they did Republicans—approximately 38 percent each (Cotter and Stovall 2009). Today, around 54 percent of Alabamians consider themselves Republicans compared to only about 30 percent who consider themselves Democrats—a twenty-four-point Democratic deficit (AUM Poll 2020b).<sup>7</sup> And in virtually any given statewide election, Republican candidates typically defeat Democrats by twenty to thirty percentage points.

Despite all of the issues Alabama Democrats face, there have been some positive developments in recent years indicating that their worst days are perhaps behind them. To begin, it appears that in statewide campaigns, Democratic support finally bottomed out sometime in the mid-2010s, as there appear to be no more White voters for them to lose and a few of them to gain among younger voters and in urban and suburban areas. In 2016, Hillary Clinton earned just 34.4 percent of the state's total presidential vote—the smallest general election vote share for any Democratic presidential candidate since 1968 when George Wallace ran against Democrat Hubert Humphrey as an independent. In 2020, Joe Biden received 36.6 percent of the vote—a modest improvement of 2.2 points. In gubernatorial politics, the Democratic candidate, Parker Griffith, won 36.4 percent of the 2014 vote; whereas in 2018, Democrat Walt Maddox won 40.4 percent, for an improvement of four points.

By far the greatest Democratic success in recent years was in the 2017 U.S. Senate special election when Doug Jones defeated embattled Republican candidate Roy Moore to become the first Democratic senator to win election in Alabama since Richard Shelby in 1992. Upon Donald Trump's election as president in 2016, Alabama's junior Republican senator, Jeff Sessions, became Trump's pick for U.S. attorney general, creating a vacancy for Governor Bentley to fill. Bentley, who was already ensnared in his extramarital affair scandal, was under investigation by the state's attorney general, Luther Strange. In what became widely interpreted as a corrupt bargain, Bentley appointed Strange to the vacant Senate seat, thereby giving Bentley an opportunity to appoint a new attorney general—one who would presumably inherit Strange's investigation into the governor (Hughes 2017).

Bentley's appointment of Strange to the U.S. Senate infuriated voters, and following Bentley's resignation as governor, a special election was announced to consider his future. At this time, Roy Moore, already suspended from office by the Court of

the Judiciary, resigned his post as chief justice to run against Strange in the Republican primary. Moore had extensive experience in statewide campaigns, and due to his firebrand conservatism, he was the darling of White, rural, Evangelical voters. After forcing Strange into a runoff, Moore defeated the incumbent to face Democratic nominee Doug Jones in a December general election (Hughes 2017).<sup>8</sup> But just over a month before the election, the *Washington Post* published a bombshell story alleging that Moore, as a younger man, had behaved in a sexually inappropriate manner toward women as young as fourteen (McCrummen, Reinhardt, and Crites 2017).

The accusations against Moore, who denied all wrongdoing, upended the election. Democratic voters surged to the polls while Republican turnout sagged. On Election Day, Jones narrowly defeated Moore by 1.6 percentage points, or by fewer than twenty-two thousand votes—a margin smaller than the number of voters casting write-in ballots. Propelling Jones to victory was a better-than-average performance in some of the state's more suburban and better-educated counties like Madison, Tuscaloosa, and Lee—counties that typically vote Republican given their large White and affluent populations (Hughes 2017). Jones's victory proved anomalous, however, as two years later, former Auburn University football coach, Republican Tommy Tuberville, defeated Jones in his reelection effort by more than twenty percentage points.

Doug Jones's temporary success, however, illuminates another potential bright spot for state Democrats in light of developments in neighboring states like Georgia (Bullock et al. 2019). Since Alabama's conservative White population realigned into the Republican Party, Democrats have struggled to break the 40 percent vote threshold in any statewide election. Jones's 2017 victory not only relied on the foundation of Democratic support in Alabama—African American voters in cities and in the Black Belt—but made significant inroads into areas traditionally won by Republicans—suburban areas with wealthier, better-educated voters—and among groups of Whites traditionally aligned with Republicans.

According to an exit poll by NBC News conducted during the Jones-Moore election, Jones performed better than expected among younger voters, voters with a college education, and female voters (NBC News 2018). According to the poll, Jones won voters aged eighteen to forty-four by over twenty-two percentage points. Voters with a college degree preferred Jones to Moore by a margin of eleven percentage points, and female voters preferred Jones to Moore by sixteen percentage points. And while Jones only received 30 percent of the White vote, he polled significantly better among Whites with a college education and White women. According to the survey, Jones received eight percentage points more support from White women compared to White men, and he received eighteen percentage points more support among White college graduates compared to non-college graduates.

While Jones lost his reelection effort, public opinion research suggests that some of the demographics previously mentioned might be primed to realign toward the Democratic Party should current trends continue. In October 2020, a survey conducted by Auburn University at Montgomery gauged 948 likely Alabama voters'



Table 13.1. Alabama Demographics and Partisanship

	<i>Democrat</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Republican</i>
Race			
Black	62.9	15.5	15.3
White	17.0	9.7	70.3
Gender			
Female	33.0	11.5	50.6
Male	27.5	11.5	57.6
Age			
18–24	41.4	14.9	30.8
25–34	32.9	13.1	47.1
35–44	39.9	13.6	44.4
45–54	32.5	16.3	50.0
55–64	25.0	10.5	61.4
65+	16.7	3.7	78.1
Education			
High school	29.1	11.4	57.0
Some college	31.0	6.1	60.0
College degree	25.6	14.6	57.4
Graduate degree	37.9	8.8	51.5
Income			
Less than \$25k	37.7	15.5	39.1
\$25k–\$49.9k	29.2	9.6	59.2
\$50k–\$74.9k	25.0	14.0	56.1
\$75k–\$99.9k	24.7	7.7	65.3
\$100k–\$149.9k	28.0	8.6	59.6
\$150k+	31.4	8.7	59.2
Total	30.2	11.5	54.0

*Note:* Table entries represent percentages. Survey conducted October 21–28, 2020, by Auburn University at Montgomery's AUM Poll. *N* = 948 likely Alabama voters.

party preferences and found similarities with the 2017 special election (AUM Poll 2020b). I present the findings from this survey in table 13.1, which shows not only remnants of the old Wallace and anti-Wallace coalitions of the 1980s to 2000s but also the prospect for Democratic expansion now that the political realignment of that era is complete.

We can see remnants of the previous party era's coalitions from table 13.1 by examining race and income. Wallace and his Democratic successors relied heavily (and increasingly) on African American support as the Reagan Revolution swept increasing numbers of Whites into the Republican Party (Cotter and Stovall 2009). The partisan gap between Black and White respondents who identify as Democrats is forty-six percentage points, and the gap between the percent of Black and White Republicans is even bigger at fifty-five percentage points. The Wallace coalition also relied on poorer voters as Alabama Republicanism became increasingly the party of better-off voters. We see from table 13.1 that while Democrats enjoy support from

the poorest voters, Republicans today have a partisan advantage in nearly every income bracket. This is good evidence that the realignment of poorer (especially rural) Whites into the Republican Party is all but complete.

Now that the previous era of partisan realignment is passed, however, we can examine issues like age, education, and gender to get a potential glimpse of the next era in Alabama's partisan politics. Over the last several years, aside from their deficit among non-White voters, the national Republican Party has struggled with younger, better-educated, and female voters in particular (Pew Research Center 2020). Among all Americans, Democrats have opened up an eighteen-percentage-point lead over Republicans among female voters, a twenty-point lead among college graduates, and a sixteen-point lead among voters under the age of forty.

Though less stark in degree, many of the same trends can be found in Alabama politics today. Examining results from table 13.1, observe that in all but one age cohort, more Alabamians identify as Republicans compared to Democrats. Nevertheless, the youngest cohort of voters—those aged eighteen to twenty-four—are approximately ten percentage points more Democratic than Republican. By comparison, the oldest cohort of Alabamians—those aged sixty-five or older—are sixty-one percentage points more Republican than Democratic. Should this trend continue, Democrats could eventually begin to contest elections as younger voters age and begin voting en masse and as older voters are generationally replaced in the electorate.

We also see evidence from survey data that the modern Alabama Republican Party might have issues with female voters. Again, state Republicans don't face the same steep obstacles as their national counterpart, but we see from table 13.1 that female respondents are indeed less likely to identify as Republicans. Compared to males, female respondents are 7 percentage points less Republican and 5.5 percentage points more Democratic.

Finally, education in Alabama shows modest signs that it is affecting partisanship. Though Republicans enjoy majority support among all categories of education in table 13.1, we see that individuals with a postgraduate education are more likely to identify as Democrats. Only about 29 percent of Alabamians with less than a postgraduate degree identify as Democrats compared to 38 percent of postgraduates who identify as Democrats. Even still, postgraduates only make up approximately 10 percent of Alabama adults aged twenty-five or older according to U.S. Census estimates.<sup>9</sup>

An additional development may bode well for the future of Alabama Democrats. A perennial complaint among state party members has been that the party's State Democratic Executive Committee (SDEC) was poorly organized, neglected grassroots organization, was uncompetitive, and was monopolized by an older generation of Democratic leaders who no longer represented younger, more progressive interests. In 2019, the party ousted Nancy Worley as chair of the SDEC and elected Chris England, a young state legislator from Tuscaloosa, as its first Black chair (Cason 2019). Proponents of the move, including Doug Jones, argued that new leadership would reinvigorate the party moving forward, especially among younger voters.



Given the demographic trends just explored, one might be tempted to conclude that Alabama might begin to vote like other southern states such as Georgia and Virginia, where Democrats have begun contesting and winning statewide elections. Closer inspection, however, makes clear that it will be many years before Democrats can once again compete on an even footing with Republicans for statewide office.

Principally, Alabama has not experienced the same economic growth or social immigration compared to these other, more competitive states. With the exception of recent booms in the Birmingham and Huntsville areas, the Alabama populace has remained largely stagnant over time.<sup>10</sup> As of the 1970 decennial census, 58.6 percent of the state lived in an urban area. According to the 2010 census, 59.0 percent of the population lived in an urban area—an increase of 0.7 percent over a forty-year period. By comparison, over the same forty-year period, Georgia became 24.5 percent more urban as it went from 60.3 percent urban to 75.1 percent urban.<sup>11</sup>

Alabama's failure to attract major new industries has also inhibited its ability to attract a vibrant and diverse new workforce. In 1970, Alabama and Georgia looked quite similar demographically. Alabama's population was approximately 3.4 million, and Georgia's was approximately 4.6 million. Each state was approximately 26 percent African American and 74 percent White. Nearly a half century of growth in Georgia, however, has left its western neighbor lagging far behind. By 2019, Georgia's population had grown by 127 percent to 10.4 million, while Alabama's had grown just 42 percent to 4.9 million. This massive in-migration has also left Georgia significantly less White. Today, it is just 59 percent White (a decline of 21 percent over forty-nine years), while Alabama remains 68 percent White (a decline of just 7 percent).

Alabama has experienced considerable partisan change over the past half century. Long a solidly Democratic state, White voters began abandoning the Democratic Party as Black voters registered as Democrats following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. A brief period from the 1980s to the 2000s emerged in which Democrats and Republicans competed on a near-even footing before Republicans consolidated the White vote and assumed virtually unchecked control of state government. In recent years, Democrats have shown some signs of improving their electoral fortunes among younger, better-educated, and female voters, but they continue to lose most statewide offices by at least twenty percentage points due in part to Alabama's stagnant population and economy. Thus, for the foreseeable future, Alabama is likely to remain tightly under the control of Republicans.

## ISSUES IN ALABAMA POLITICS

Alabama politics have evolved significantly over the past half century. Racist politicians of yesteryear would hardly recognize a political system in which African Americans comprise a total of 26 percent of all registered voters,<sup>12</sup> where 26 percent of the state House of Representatives and 20 percent of the state Senate are African Ameri-

can, where one representative to the U.S. House of Representatives is an African American, and where the mayors of two of the state's largest cities in Birmingham and Montgomery—long bastions of White supremacy—are African Americans.

And yet, despite such momentous change, much of Alabama's politics remains little altered. To begin, race, even when not directly on the surface, lurks beneath nearly every issue in state politics. According to results presented in table 13.1, Alabama's political parties are badly racially polarized. Only 17 percent of White voters identify as Democrats, and only 15 percent of Black voters identify as Republicans (AUM Poll 2020b). Because African Americans only make up about 27 percent of the state's population, Whites win virtually every statewide office. And political campaigns for those offices, in addition to the policy struggles that happen there, are oftentimes symbolically racial.

Take, for example, the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act of 2017. The legislation prohibits the removal of monuments that have been in place for at least forty years and is widely interpreted as intended to protect monuments erected in honor of Confederate causes (Cason 2017). The original legislation was controversial at the time of its passage, but following the 2020 death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police and the wave of protests it sparked against police brutality of African Americans, criticism of such Confederate symbols only increased. Following the protests, Democratic lawmakers filed proposals to repeal the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act, but these efforts have thus far faltered in light of Republican opposition (Cason 2021).

Public opinion is divided over issues like Confederate symbols in Alabama, and these divisions often trace directly to racial cleavages in the population. In July 2020, a survey conducted by Auburn University at Montgomery measured registered voters' opinions on several salient topics (AUM Poll 2020a). I report some key findings from the survey in table 13.2. By far the biggest polarizing force among Alabama's White and Black population was Donald Trump.<sup>13</sup> Nearly 66 percent of the White

Table 13.2. Public Opinion in Alabama on Salient Political Issues

Issue	All Voters		Black Voters		White Voters	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Confederate Monuments	52.3	25.1	44.3	24.5	57.4	23.1
Southern Border wall	53.5	29.9	25.9	45.7	65.7	21.9
Peaceful BLM protests	61.9	12.0	79.3	6.6	54.4	22.0
Noncriminal citizenship	54.5	21.7	63.7	7.0	50.0	27.8
President Donald Trump	53.3	38.3	23.5	65.1	65.9	27.3

Note: Table entries represent percentages. Survey conducted July 2–9, 2020, by Auburn University at Montgomery's AUM Poll. *N* = 596 registered Alabama voters.



population supports the former president compared to only 24 percent of African Americans—a forty-two-percentage-point gap.

Donald Trump's biggest issue during his 2016 presidential campaign was immigration and support for a southern border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Consequently, racial attitudes toward immigration closely mirror those toward Trump himself. According to the results of the survey, nearly 66 percent of White Alabamians support construction of a border wall compared to only 26 percent of African Americans. A smaller racial gap exists regarding a potential pathway to citizenship for residents who were unlawfully brought into the United States as children and have no criminal record. According to the survey, approximately 64 percent of African Americans support such a policy proposal compared to only 50 percent of Whites.

Issues related to Confederate symbols and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that erupted throughout the summer of 2020 also show signs of racial polarization, though not as much compared to immigration. According to survey results, 57 percent of White Alabamians approve of legislation preventing the removal of Confederate monuments compared to only 44 percent of Black respondents. Nevertheless, while 79 percent of Black respondents reported their support of peaceful BLM protesters, only 54 percent of Whites showed such support (AUM Poll 2020a).

Further investigation of survey results indicates that not only is race an important predictor of support for President Trump, restrictive immigration policies, and Confederate symbols, but adherence to Evangelicalism also appears to drive such support. In table 13.3, I present results from the same survey and questions with results drawn only from White respondents. Responses are divided by a respondent's religious affiliation: Evangelical or otherwise.

We see from table 13.3 that, even when focusing only on White respondents, Evangelicals are disproportionately more likely to voice support for policies or politicians that have racially conservative implications. Again, the most polarizing factor from this set of survey results is Donald Trump and immigration. There is a nearly fifteen-percentage-point gap in support for Trump between White Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. Evangelical Whites are also significantly more likely than non-Evangelical Whites to support a southern border wall, to oppose a path to citizenship for undocumented children with no criminal record, to support Confederate

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Table 13.3. Public Opinion in Alabama among Whites

Issue	White Evangelical		White Non-Evangelical	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Confederate monuments	65.7	18.0	51.3	26.8
Southern border wall	71.1	18.5	62.0	24.3
Peaceful BLM protests	50.6	23.7	57.2	20.7
Noncriminal citizenship	40.7	30.2	56.8	26.0
President Donald Trump	74.3	19.7	59.7	34.5

Note: Table entries represent percentages. Survey conducted July 2–9, 2020, by Auburn University at Montgomery's AUM Poll. *N* = 596 registered Alabama voters.

monuments, and to oppose peaceful BLM protests (AUM Poll 2020a). Thus, in looking for the root causes of polarization in Alabama politics, race and adherence to evangelicalism are two critical issues.

Evangelical politics in Alabama touch on other social issues unrelated directly to race but that arise from the so-called culture wars stemming from the emergence of groups such as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, and the Tea Party movement. This is especially true with respect to issues surrounding women's access to abortion.

In recent years, a spate of new legislation restricting women's access to abortion has been enacted.<sup>15</sup> In 1997, the state passed sweeping antiabortion legislation that, among other things, made it a felony to abort a fetus that had achieved viability.<sup>16</sup> In 2002, the state passed an informed-consent law requiring, among other things, verification that women seeking an abortion had seen or waived seeing an ultrasound of the fetus.<sup>16</sup> In 2013, the state restricted the availability of abortion-inducing drugs.<sup>17</sup> In 2014, the state amended its statutes governing abortions for minors seeking to obtain an abortion without parental consent via judicial bypass to allow judges to appoint counsel to represent the interests of the unborn.<sup>18</sup> And in 2019, the state enacted its strictest antiabortion measure yet when it banned—without exceptions for cases of rape or incest—nearly all abortions such that violators would be sentenced to ninety-nine years of imprisonment (Lyman 2019).

Since the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court made it the only state to recognize same-sex marriage in 2003,<sup>19</sup> Alabama legislators have also been keen to restrict the rights of sexual or other gender minorities. In 2006, voters and the state legislature approved a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage in the state.<sup>20</sup> This effort was renewed after the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the state's ban in 2015.<sup>21</sup> In 2017, the state passed new legislation allowing private agencies to deny same-sex couples' applications to adopt children (Bendix 2017). And during the 2021 legislative session, Republican lawmakers introduced new legislation that would criminally ban doctors from treating transgender children with therapies such as puberty blockers (Burkhalter 2021).

Evangelicalism, however, has lost some of its potency in recent years with respect to other political affairs. This is especially true of the third rail of Alabama politics—gambling. Gambling has long been a major issue in Alabama dating back at least to the administration of Democratic governor Don Siegelman (Stewart 2016). The issue pits several interests against one another in Alabama, including the Poarch Creek Indians, who operate legal casinos across Alabama and who are significant donors to numerous politicians, dog track owners and other small bingo sites that compete with the Poarch Creeks, and Evangelicals with a long-held moral opposition to gambling.

In 1999, Alabama voters rejected a cornerstone of Siegelman's 1998 gubernatorial campaign—an education lottery akin to that established in Georgia—by a margin of ten percentage points, largely due to the opposition of religious groups (Manuel 1999). During the 2000s, the so-called gaming wars only escalated as Republican




governor Bob Riley went to battle with his own attorney general and cracked down on what he viewed as illegal bingo halls (Stewart 2016). Since then, lawmakers have consistently endeavored to create a lottery to shore up the state's perennially embattled Education Trust Fund. Nevertheless, politicians beholden to donors like the Poarch Creek Indians or other regional gaming interests have struggled to thread the legislative needle in a manner that would create a state lottery to fund education without earmarking the funds for other projects or affording any one gaming interest a monopoly on gambling revenue.

Today, a major roadblock to an education lottery has been cleared as, after more than twenty years, Evangelical opposition to gambling has significantly waned. According to survey research, a majority of Alabamians (56 percent) support a state-run education lottery (AUM Poll 2020a). This even includes a majority of Evangelical respondents, who support the creation of a state-run education lottery at a rate of 54 percent. And for the first time in a generation, legislators appear poised to pass a major piece of gaming legislation. During the 2021 legislative session, lawmakers introduced an ambitious new grand compromise on gambling aiming to satisfy each of the key players in the lottery debate that appears to have better odds of passage than any other bill in recent memory (Moon 2021).

Overt racism is no longer a viable campaign strategy in Alabama politics. Nevertheless, the politics of race, which dominated state life for generations, are never far from the surface. Over time, conservative Whites, and especially White Evangelicals, gravitated toward new political issues that similarly otherize vulnerable minorities, including women and sexual minorities. Today, one is as likely to hear conservative politicians demonize welfare recipients (long considered a symbolic attack on racial minorities and especially African Americans) as transgender persons. So long as White Evangelicals continue to dominate state politics, this trend is unlikely to change.

## CONCLUSION

Alabama politics is a story of political and social division, demagoguery, and one-party rule. Historically, Alabamians have been divided by race and party. Prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, these divisions were codified via Jim Crow restrictions on the franchise. The Voting Rights Act proved a critical juncture for state politics, however. The mass mobilization of African American voters who joined the Democratic Party in overwhelming numbers ushered in a period of biracial politics that lasted for roughly a generation between the 1980s and 2000s. Nevertheless, conservative Whites, unwilling to share their party with Black voters, gradually realigned to form a new party of White identity politics-- the modern Alabama Republican Party. 

Today, Alabama's political realignment of yesteryear is complete, and a new party era has begun. Alabamians are overwhelmingly divided by race such that most Whites are Republicans, and most Blacks are Democrats. Given the state's inabil-

ity to develop a highly educated, diverse workforce, population patterns today are similar to those fifty years ago. Consequently, White identity politics—specifically Evangelical politics—continue to dominate Alabama as voters and legislators push new policies that glorify symbols of the Confederacy, restrict women's access to abortion, and limit the rights and liberties of sexual minorities. Republican hegemony is therefore thorough and under no serious or immediate threat from Democrats.

Nevertheless, we can begin to see how Alabama politics might begin to change should nascent patterns persist over the long run. The 2017 U.S. Senate special election in which the Democratic candidate, Doug Jones, prevailed lays the groundwork for the future of Alabama Democrats. Younger Alabamians are far less likely to identify as Republicans compared to their elders and will eventually begin to vote in large numbers as they generationally replace older cohorts of Republicans. And should population centers such as Birmingham and Huntsville continue to grow and attract a highly educated workforce, they too could begin to vote more Democratic.

## NOTES

1. A “trifecta” refers to unified partisan control of both chambers of the state legislature and the governorship. Parties that enjoy trifectas can much more easily advance their political agendas.

2. Numerous eras in southern history have been so described as representing a “New South” (e.g., Woodward 1971). In this context, however, I refer to a renewed period of two-party competition that emerged sometime in the late 2000s during which Democrats represented racially progressive, diverse interests that were unaligned with their White, conservative forebears.

3. See U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles>.

4. The Alabama Senate has fewer seats compared to the state House of Representatives. With geographically larger districts, it is therefore more difficult for African Americans to achieve parity with their proportion of the state population in the Senate.

5. The “big mules” are a collection of business interests that have played an outsized role in state politics for generations (Key 1949). Historically, the mules were a coalition of agricultural and industrial interests from the state's Black belt and metropolitan centers (Permaloff 2008).

6. See *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2015). This was, in fact, Moore's second time being removed from the position of chief justice. The first occurred in 2003 when he refused to obey a federal court order to remove a giant monument of the Ten Commandments he had installed in the Alabama Supreme Court building. See *Glassroth v. Moore*, 335 F.3d 1282 (2003).

7. See table 13.1.

8. Doug Jones had gained notoriety as a federal attorney who successfully prosecuted members of the Ku Klux Klan for their role in the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama (Edmondson 2020).

9. See U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles>.

10. In recent years, Birmingham has become a hub for the health care industry given the dominant role of the University of Alabama at Birmingham's medical hospital. According to a